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The Somerset and Lothian Miners
1919 - c.1947
Changing Attitudes to Pit Work in the
Twentieth Century

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Submitted for the award
of Ph.D. at the University
of Warwick, Centre for the
Study of Social History.

January 1990

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Abstract

The somewhat neglected topic of attitudes to mining, as an influence on labour supply in the coal industry, is the subject of this thesis. By the 1940s antagonism to mining was a nationwide phenomena, although the regional experiences of miners and their families varied considerably between the wars. The study therefore starts at regional level before moving on to consider from a broader perspective the topic of changing attitudes to pit work.

The first part of the thesis comprises a comparative study of the Somerset and Lothian (Mid and East Lothian) coalfields, two districts which have attracted little attention from historians. An overview of the industry in both areas is given in the opening chapter, where the regional characteristics of ownership and management are also discussed. The following three chapters focus respectively on change and continuity in the work place; life in the mining communities; the relationship between the miners' unions and the wider labour movement. The perspective shifts to national level in chapter five but the theme of regional influence on attitudes to pit work is carried forward by extensive reference to a Social Survey inquiry carried out in Scottish mining communities (including those of Mid and East Lothian) in 1946. Finally, the impact of the second World War and of nationalisation are considered, before a survey and commentary on general attitudes to mining and miners over time.

The conclusion reached is that post-nationalisation labour-supply problems had their origins in the decades before the second World War. As the social and psychological isolation of the mining communities broke down over the inter-war period, circumstances within the industry and wider socio-economic change combined to erode the tradition of occupational inheritance and to promote the growth of negative or hostile attitudes to mining as an occupation.

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Abbreviations

BUL	Bristol University Library
CMRC	Coal Mines Reorganisation Commission
DLP	Divisional Labour Party
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LCOA	Lothian Coal Owners Association
MAGB	Mining Association of Great Britain
MELMA	Mid and East Lothian Miners Association
MAGB	Mining Association of Great Britain
MFGB	Miners Federation of Great Britain
NCB	National Coal Board
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUSM	National Union of Scottish Mineworkers
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers Union
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
SCL	Somerset Collieries Ltd.
SCOA	Somerset Coal Owners Association
SMA	Somerset Miners Association
SMIU	Somerset Miners Industrial Union
SRO	Somerset Record Office
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UMS	United Mineworkers of Scotland
WRH	West Register House, The Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

Preface

This thesis has its origins in an earlier study of the Somerset coalfield, during the period from nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947 to the closure of the last pit in the district in 1973.⁽¹⁾ An acute and persistent shortage of labour emerged as a primary factor in determining the pace at which mining was rundown in North Somerset in those years but the labour - supply problem could not be explained entirely by post-war circumstances in the coal industry nor by wider socio-economic change. A shortage of labour (particularly of juvenile recruits) was already a problem in Somerset by the mid 1930s, as it was in some other coalfields. Indeed, Bill Williamson has argued that 'the social base of mining, the mining community, was disappearing' in the 1930s as the cycle of reproduction of a labour force began to break down.⁽²⁾

This broad conclusion (based on Williamson's study of one pit village, Throckley, on the Durham - Northumberland border) raised questions about regional variations in the inter-war experience of the coalfields and how these might have affected the way miners felt about their occupation. The purpose of the thesis is therefore to consider circumstances in the mines and communities of the Somerset and Lothian coalfields between the wars as influences on attitudes to pit work and, further, to explore the

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1. P.M. Bonsall, 'The Decline of the Somerset Coalfield, 1947 - 1973', M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1985.
 2. Bill Williamson, Class, Culture and Community: a Bibliographical Study of Social Change in Mining, (1928), p. 200.

Note: Place of publication London unless otherwise stated.

attitudes of miners, their families and of the general public to the industry in the 1940s.

The comparisons drawn between the two areas are mainly of a ^{it} qualitative rather than a quantitative kind, which is accounted for chiefly by the availability and nature of source materials. Numerous sources exist for the Somerset coalfield but there are relatively few for the Lothians. Moreover, in many government publications and in such annual publications as the Proceedings of the Miners Federation of Great Britain it is commonplace to find aggregate figures for Scottish coalfields (categorised as one district rather than by county) in the statistical tables. The Somerset coalfield features more frequently as a distinct entity but is, nonetheless, often subsumed in the category 'Others' with the small coalfields of Bristol, the Forest of Dean, Cumberland and Kent. Where comparative figures were available they were often irrelevant to the topic or of limited use. Thus, figures of average numbers employed could have been used to compare the level of union membership over time but no figures of annual membership of either the Somerset Miners Association or the Mid and East Lothian Miners Association were located.

Newspapers were used as sources in both areas but whereas the Somerset coalfield was served by only one newspaper, two weekly papers were published in the Lothians. National Scottish daily papers (The Scotsman and the Edinburgh Evening News) also gave

coverage to events in the coal industry, as did the Labour Standard which had a short-lived circulation in Edinburgh and the surrounding area. Because of the sheer volume of newsprint involved only selective research was undertaken in the Lothian press and it yielded somewhat meagre results.

The pursuit of oral evidence was even less productive. Appeals through the media, letters to Miners' Welfare Institutes (in the Lothians), personal contacts and approaches to individuals suggested as likely interviewees by the Scottish Mining Museum researcher produced fourteen volunteers in the Lothians and five in Somerset. Not all those in the Lothians, for various reasons, took part in the project but ten men (all face workers with the exception of one office clerk) were interviewed and two of their wives. With the exception of two face workers, these men and women were all born in mining families. Those who took part in Somerset were Mr. C. Weeks (son of a miner; colliery manager); Stanley Chivers (face worker, son of a miner, now in his eighties); Mr and Mrs Smith (face worker, son of an office clerk; daughter of a miner) and Mr and Mrs Dowling. Mr Dowling worked in local government, as his father did, and his main contribution was in recalling social conditions in the area before the second World War. Mrs Dowling also shared her memories of community life and of the labour movement in the coalfield between the wars. Her father, E.T.Carter, was a miner until 1921 and a prominent labour activist. General discussion rather than formal interviews took place with all these people and what little material was taped has not been transcribed. Personal reminiscences often offered

(x)

insights into the past and some of these have been used in the text to illustrate various points.

The author wishes to thank all those who have advised or assisted in the preparation of this thesis, with particular mention of Dr. A. Mason, University of Warwick and Dr. T.W.R. Rodgers, Bath C.H.E.; Dr. F. Reid, University of Warwick, for comments on the original proposal; Alan Campbell for reading and commenting on a later draft of the thesis; James Young, Ian McDougall and David Smith (Dalkeith Local History Society) for answering early enquiries about sources for the Lothians; F. H. Clews, N. C. B. Archive Centre; David Bevan, University College of Swansea; Stephen Bird, Labour Party Archivist; Jane Denholm, Researcher at the Scottish Mining Museum (Newtongrange) and Brian Gall, District Librarian, Haddington, East Lothian; Julian Rutter for the loan of photocopied records of Frome Divisional Labour Party. Thanks are also due to the staff at various record offices and libraries visited in the course of research; to those people in Somerset and the Lothians who took part in the project, especially to Mrs. Dowling (for permission to read, refer to and quote from her father's diaries) and to Tom Hardie, Secretary of Musselburgh Miners Welfare Institute, for arranging an entertaining and informative meeting with James Bush and friends at the Institute.

Introduction

Between the wars mining was one of the most depressed industries, characterised by a sharp decline in total numbers employed and by persistently high levels of unemployment. Yet as the economy began to improve from around 1934 it became apparent that in some coalfields a shortage of labour and particularly of juvenile recruits was becoming a problem. Over the period of the second World War total numbers employed continued to decline, in spite of emergency measures to restrict the movement of labour out of the pits and for special recruitment to mining. In the immediate post-war years, during the run up to nationalisation and beyond, shortage of manpower was a major difficulty for the coal industry.

Concern about recruitment and retention of labour prompted several official inquiries in the 1940s into attitudes to mining, which revealed wide-spread hostility towards the occupation and a growing determination among parents in the mining communities to keep their sons out of the pits. This was a particularly serious matter in an industry which was heavily dependant on a strong tradition of occupational inheritance for its main supply of labour because, at most periods of its history, mining has attracted relatively few adult entrants to the pits.

Although the antagonism towards mining which existed by the 1940s was a nation-wide phenomena, differences in regional conditions and circumstances meant that the inter-war experience of miners and their families varied considerably. Sharp contrasts existed between the derelict pit villages so commonplace in County Durham

and the expansion underway in the developing coalfields of Kent and the Dukeries area of the east Midlands. Attitudes towards pit-work had, like so much else in the coal industry, a regional and national dimension. They were shaped and influenced by the experience of work in the pit, of life in the mining community, by broad socio-economic change in the country as a whole and by the relationship between the mining population and the rest of society.

One of the main challenges of writing any history of mining is reconciling the local and national dimensions. It is widely recognised that the regionalism of the industry is so significant that if it is not taken fully into account, general conclusions may be invalidated. Yet focussing on a particular coalfield may well produce explanations for attitudes which are satisfactory only in relation to one district and largely irrelevant to mining in general. The structure of this thesis goes some way towards solving that problem, by making a comparative regional study the basis for a broader examination of the theme of attitudes to mining.

A proliferation of regional studies over the years⁽¹⁾ has left few coalfields with their history still unwritten but neither Somerset or the Lothians have attracted much attention from historians. As the bibliography reveals, relatively little research has been done in either area. Furthermore the standard published works are of limited scope and both are out of print.

1. See J.Benson, R.G.Neville and C.H.Thompson, Bibliography of the British Coal Industry (1981).

C. J. Down and A. J. Warrington's The History of the Somerset Coalfield (Newton Abbot, 1973) is a technical history of the industry, chiefly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A. Storer Cunningham's Mining in Mid and East Lothian from Earliest Times to Present Day (Edinburgh, 1925) is a descriptive and rather sketchy account, aimed at a general readership. As to attitudes to pit work, this topic has been addressed indirectly in both W. H. B. Court's official history of the industry in the second World War⁽²⁾ and in volume 4 of The History of the British Coal Industry, edited by Barry Supple.⁽³⁾ References to attitudes can also be found in other general works, such as Ferdinand Zweig's Men in the Pits,⁽⁴⁾ but it has not been the specific theme of any study.

This study starts at the regional level and moves on to consider the topic of changing attitudes to pit work from a broader perspective. The first chapter gives an overview of mining in Somerset and the Lothians⁽⁵⁾ between the wars, with particular reference to the characteristics of ownership and management. Change and continuity in the work place are explored in chapter two. Life in the mining communities is the ^bsubject of the third chapter while in chapter four the relationship between the miners' unions and the wider labour movement is considered.

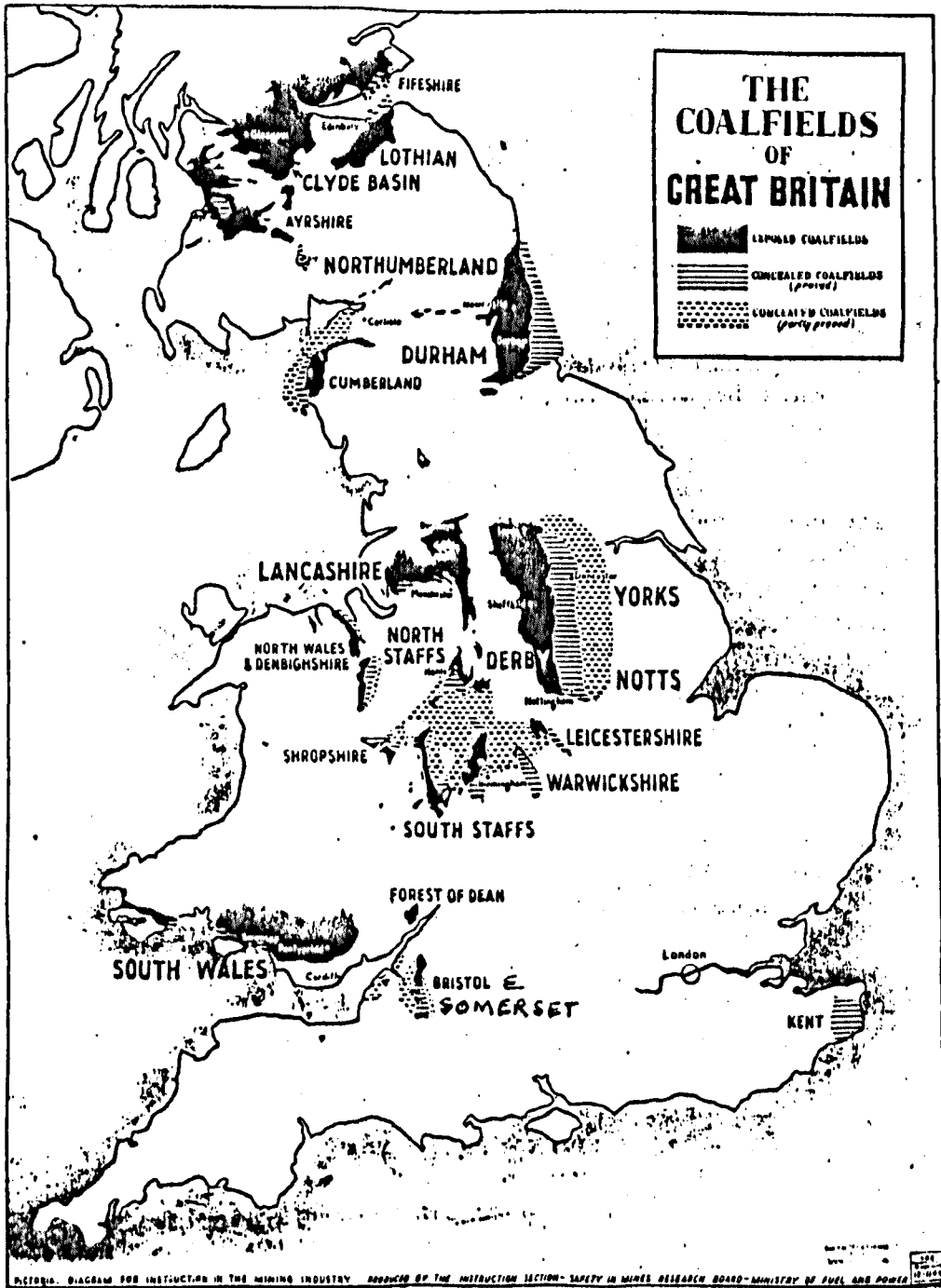
2. W. H. B. Court, Coal (HMSO 1951)

3. Barry Supple (ed.) The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume 4, 1913-1946, The Political Economy of Decline (Oxford 1987).

4. F. Zweig, Men in the Pits (1948)

5. 'The Lothians' refers throughout to the coalfields of Mid and East Lothian.

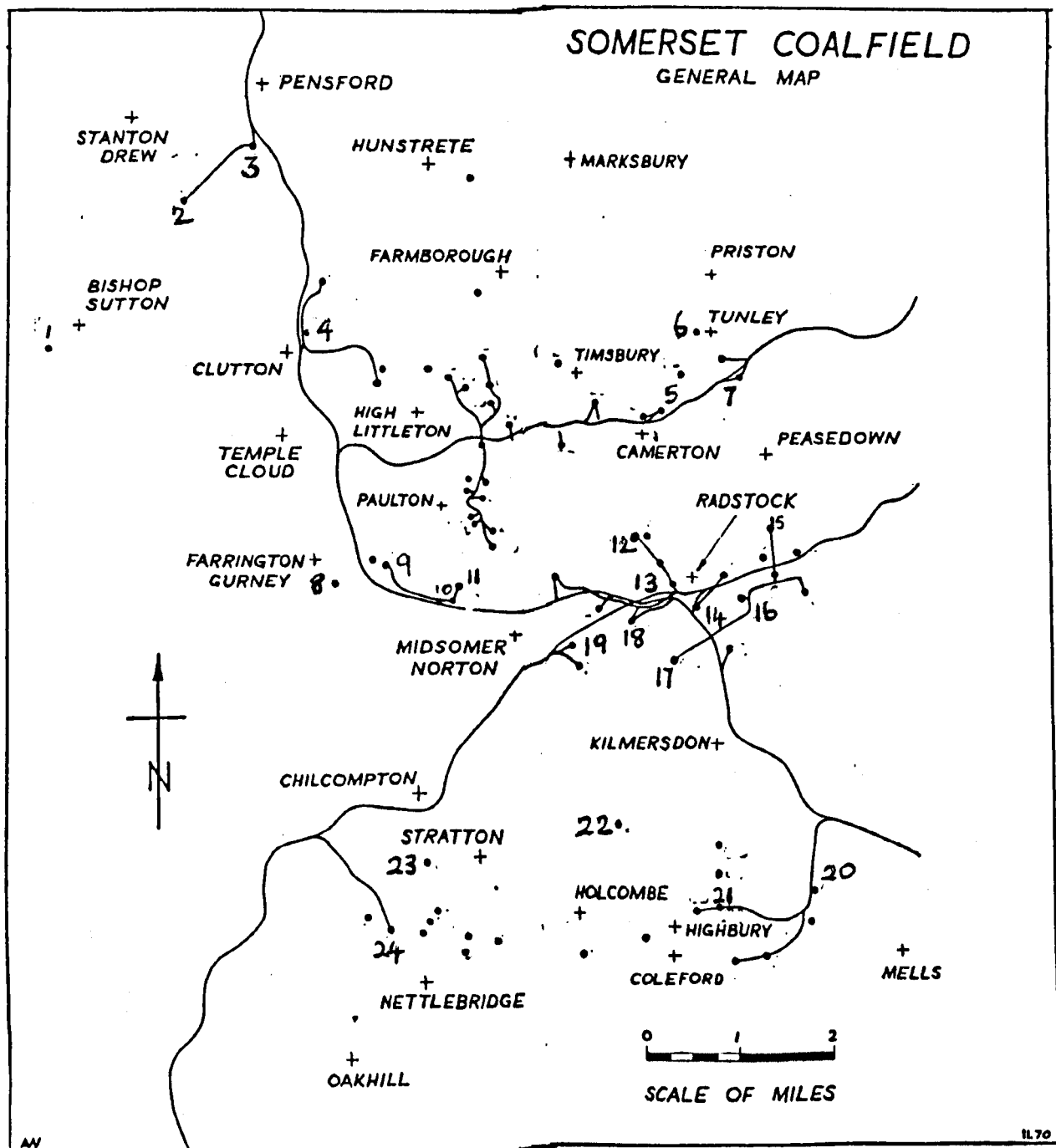
The Coalfields of Britain



1. The British coalfields in the early 1940s. (Copied from Supplé, History of the British Coal Industry, Map I, p.4.)

Influences on the recruitment and retention of labour are identified and discussed in chapter five. The perspective shifts here to national level but the theme of regional influences on attitudes is carried forward by reference to preceeding chapters in relation to the evidence of a Social Survey inquiry in the Scottish mining communities, including those of Mid and East Lothian. In chapter six the impact of the second World War and of the prospect and realisation of nationalisation of the coal industry are considered as influences on attitudes to pit work before, finally, surveying and commenting on attitudes to mining and miners over time.

The opening chapters on Somerset and the Lothians do not attempt to give a full history of mining in either region between the wars. Union policies are not examined in detail, for example, and no narrative account is given of local events during the major disputes in the coal industry in the 1920s. The aim of these chapters is to recapture some of the experiences of miners and their families between the wars in two coalfields that had much in common but, nonetheless, also show marked contrasts in the labour process and in other aspects of mining life. Both coalfields were geographically peripheral to the main coal-producing areas of England and Scotland. Mining in the two districts can be traced back to the middle ages but the Somerset coalfield never made a significant contribution to national output and although the Lothians became increasingly important as a component part of the Scottish industry from the late nineteenth century, they were always overshadowed by the

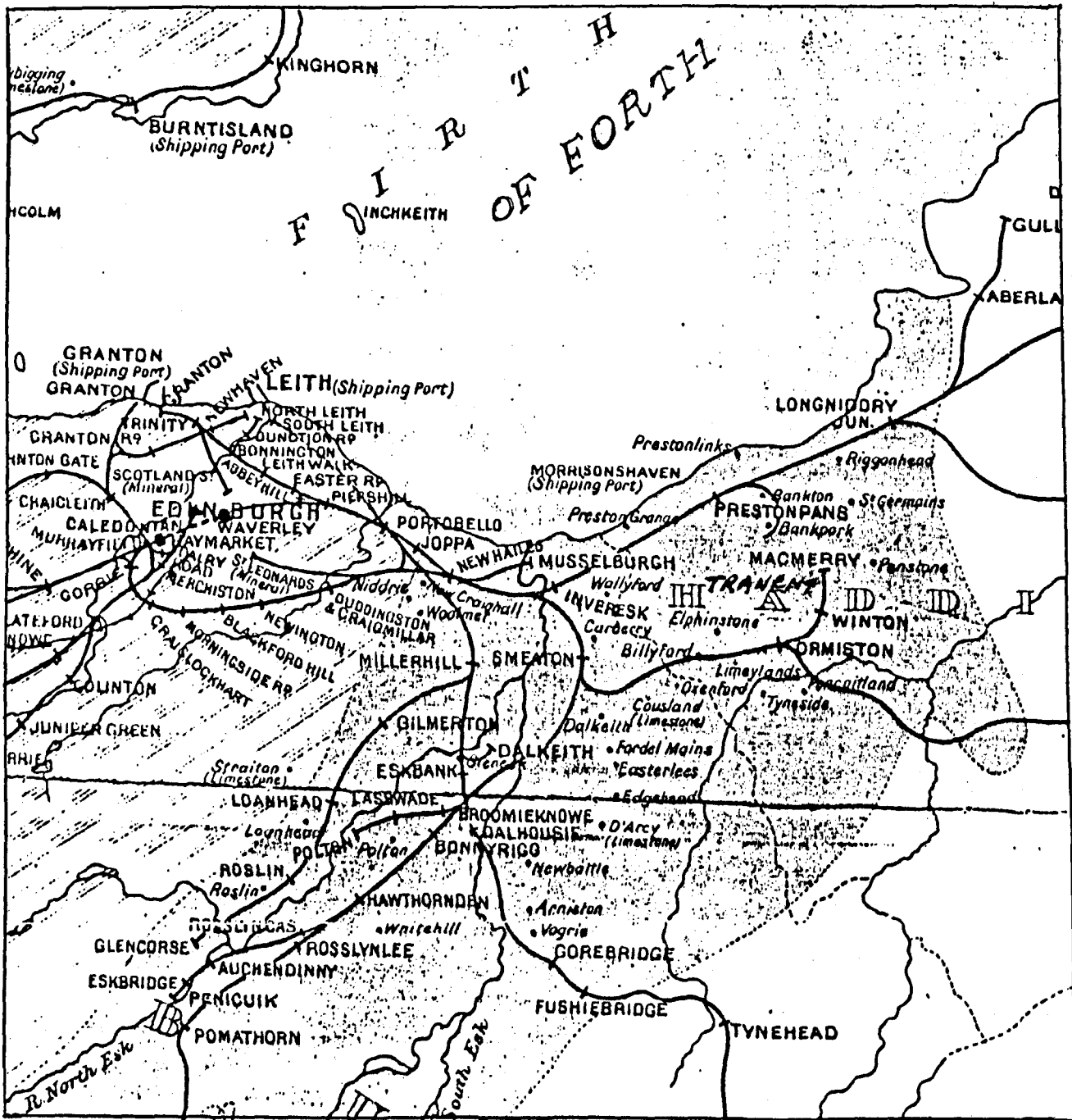


KEY: PITS AT WORK, 1919 - 1939.

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. BISHOP SUTTON | 11. OLD MILLS | 21. NEWBURY |
| 2. BROMLEY | 12. CLANDOWN | 22. CHARMBOROUGH |
| 3. PENSFORD | 13. MIDDLE PIT | 23. NEW ROCK |
| 4. BURCHELLS (CLUTTON) | 14. LUDLOWS | 24. MOOREWOOD |
| 5. CAMERTON | 15. BRAYSDOWN | Abandoned Pits |
| 6. PRISTON | 16. WRITHLINGTON | |
| 7. DUNKERTON | 17. KILMERSDON | |
| 8. MARSH LANE | 18. WELLSWAY | |
| 9. FARRINGTON | 19. NORTON HILL | |
| 10. SPRINGFIELD | 20. MELLS | |

2. The Somerset Coalfield.

(Adapted from Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.p. 14-15.)



3. The Lothian Coalfield, c.1923
(Map supplied by A.B.Campbell)

geographical size and regional output of Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and Fife. The Somerset coalfield lay in the north-eastern part of the county. Its collieries were scattered over a surface area of some forty square miles, extending from villages on the outskirts of Bath in the east to the foothills of Mendip in the west, to the village of Pensford on its northern boundaries and to mining settlements near Frome in the south. The Lothian coalfield was located south and east of Edinburgh, extending some five to ten miles inland and about fifteen miles eastward along the shores of the Firth of Forth, with some of its coal measures undersea off the coastline. The peak period of expansion in Somerset came around the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century whereas in the Lothians major development did not occur until the late nineteenth century.

Rapid development in the Lothians from 1890 to 1914, accompanied by technological change in the pits and social change in the mining communities, mark that period as a watershed in the history of mining in Mid and East Lothian. There was no similarly abrupt disjuncture in the history of mining in Somerset. Continuity, fostering conservatism, was characteristic of Somerset whereas change and a weaker tradition of mining typified the industry in the Lothians.

Chapter One.

Mining in Somerset and the Lothians;

The Characteristics of Ownership and Management.

The history of mining in Somerset and in Mid and East Lothian can be traced back to at least the middle ages⁽¹⁾ but the industry was at very different stages of development in the two coalfields at the beginning of the inter-war period. Moreover, although general trends in the British coal industry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were reflected in these areas they were modified by regional factors.

Note: all works published in London unless otherwise stated.

1. For Somerset see J. Anstie, The Coalfields of Gloucestershire and Somerset (1873); J. Bulley, 'To Mendip for Coal', Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, Part I, Proceedings SANHS, 97 (1952), pp. 46-78; Part II, Proceedings SANHS, 98(1953), pp. 17-45; C.G. Down and A.J. Warrington, The History of the Somerset Coalfield (Newton Abbot 1973). For the Lothians see A.S. Cunningham, Mining in Mid and East Lothian from Earliest Times to Present Day, (Edinburgh, 1925); A. J. Hassan, 'The Development of the Coal Industry in Mid and East Lothian, 1815-1873', Ph.D. thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1973.

The Somerset coalfields' relatively golden age came in a period from around 1790 until the comparatively late development of a railway network, from the 1840s to the 1870s. The canal-building boom of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries opened up markets in Wiltshire and Berkshire where the Somerset coal owners had a monopoly and were able to pass on their high costs of production to the consumer. The advent of the railway age brought growing competition from cheaper coal raised in the expanding Midlands coalfield.(2)

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2. R.K. Bluhm, 'A Bibliography of the Somerset Coalfield', Fellowship of the Librarians Association thesis, 1968, p.11. The network of waterways made up of the Somerset Coal Canal, the West Wiltshire and Berkshire and the Kennet and Avon canal served only the Somerset coalfield and opened up extensive markets in southern England. The first railway in the district was a broad-gauge mineral line from Frome to Radstock, opened by the Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway in 1854. No other railway was constructed until the 1870s. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, pp.17-19; see also K. Clew, The Somersetshire Coal Canal and Railways (Newton Abbot, 1970).

The formation of Radstock Collieries Ltd. in the late 1840s can be seen as part of the nation-wide emergence of relatively large firms compared to those of earlier periods but it was insignificant in relation to companies working in many other coalfields. Although it dominated the local industry in the later nineteenth century and was unusual in Somerset for both its size and profitability, it represented only an extension of the existing pattern of small scale mining operations, financed by local capital.(3)

The pace and extent of change was slow in Somerset, where small companies owning only one or two collieries and characterised by strong family interests remained typical of the county throughout its pre-nationalisation history. In addition to the persistence of this pattern of ownership, the professionalisation of management was not as fully developed as it was in some other coalfields. Lady Waldegrave appointed trained mining engineers as managers when she expanded Radstock Collieries in the 1840s but well into the twentieth century most Somerset managers were recruited from the labour force, having gained minimal qualifications at the evening classes run by the Radstock Mining Institute. In 1932, when six managers of mines in Mid and East Lothian were members of the National Association of Colliery Managers, not a single manager from Somerset belonged to the professional association.(4)

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3. A. Buchanan and N. Cossons, Industrial Archaeology of the Bristol Region (Newton Abbot, 1969), p.85; Bully 'To Mendip for Coal', Part II, passim.
 4. Transactions of the National Association of Colliery Managers, vol. XXIX (1932).

In the Lothians, the Earl of Stair's Edgehead colliery (employing a total work force of twelve in 1923) was atypical of the industry, for although the Lothian coal companies were of medium size in comparison to those of other Scottish coalfields most of them were very large compared to those in Somerset.⁽⁵⁾ By the early 1920s Edinburgh Collieries was working six mines; four other companies (Lothian Coal Company, A.G. Moore and Co. Ltd., Niddrie and Benhar Coal Co. Ltd. and the Ormiston Coal Co. Ltd.) controlled three collieries each and the Shotts Iron Company owned two mines. What is more, some of the collieries listed in Table 1:I, such as Prestongrange and Newbattle, were actually multi-pit mines⁽⁶⁾ and a single colliery company in the Lothians was both greater in scale and also likely to be financially stronger than its Somerset counterpart. There were major developments in company formation in Mid and East Lothian in the 1890s, with the expansion of the Lothian Coal Company and the movement into of the coalfield of a large iron-producing firm. In 1890 Henry Schomburg Kerr (ninth Marquis of Lothian) combined

5. The bulk of output from the Scottish coalfields was produced by a comparatively small number of very large concerns. Lanarkshire was the largest Scottish district in terms of total output but the degree of industrial concentration was marked in the Fife and Clackmannan field and in the Ayrshire and Dumfries area. In 1932 two companies produced 63 per cent of output in Fife and Clackmannan; one company produced 79 per cent of total output in Ayrshire and Dumfries. Report of the Scottish Coalfields Commission, Scottish Home Department (1944), Cmd. 6575, p.105.

6. The strict definition of a mine or colliery is 'a pit or pits ventilated by one system'.

his mining interests with those of Archibald Hood, who was a prominent figure in both the Welsh and Scottish mining industries and who had created a model pit and village at Whitehill Colliery, Rosewell, in Midlothian.⁽⁷⁾ The Lothian Coal Company was widely regarded as one of the most progressive firms in the Scottish coal industry and its Lady Victoria colliery (developed between 1890 and 1895) was a showpiece of the latest technology.

There were pre-existing links between the Lothian mining industry and the iron industry of the west of Scotland but the role of the iron companies in developing the Lothian coalfield is exemplified by the Summerlee Iron Company, which acquired Prestongrange colliery in 1895. Before the change of ownership the colliery had been worked and developed only spasmodically but the new owners invested heavily in exploration, which paid off when they breached a dyke previously thought to be impenetrable and opened up considerable areas of coal lying under the Firth of Forth off Prestonpans.⁽⁸⁾

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7. Archibald Hood, son of an overman at an Ayrshire colliery became one of Britain's wealthiest coal owners. He was general manager of the Glamorgan Coal Company, which by the end of the nineteenth century was producing more than a million tons of coal per year from six pits at Llwynpia, near Pontypridd. Although his main interests were in Wales he frequently travelled up to Rosewell in the Lothians. He kept in close contact with the Lothian Coal Company and had overall supervision of the sinking of the Lady Victoria shaft, from his Cardiff base. The information booklet produced by the Scottish Mining Museum (located at Prestongrange and Newtongrange) contains a brief history of Hood's career and of the formation of the Lothian Coal Company.
8. For a fuller account of the expansion of the Lothian companies see Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, Chapter XVll, 'The Collieries of Today,' pp. 111-25.

Companies with their major interests in the steel and iron industries of the west of Scotland had the advantage of large reserves of capital to draw on in developing their Lothian collieries but the financial strength, size and efficiency of indigenous firms (notably the Lothian Coal Company) and of some of the single-colliery companies (for example, Arniston Coal Co.) was such that no single owner or company dominated the coalfield.⁽⁹⁾

The late take-off in the Lothians during the 1890s heralded two decades of rapid change in many of the mines and communities in the coalfield, as mechanisation was pushed ahead in the pits and semi rural villages like Newtongrange were transformed into urban new towns.⁽¹⁰⁾ Moreover, the decline in the Scottish coal industry after the first World War was most severe in the older coalfields of the west. The shift of the industry to the east of the country was apparent as early as 1919, a year in which the total number of mines abandoned in Scotland included fifteen in Lanarkshire, six in Ayrshire but only one in East Lothian at Pencaitland near Haddington.⁽¹¹⁾ Output increased in the Lothians between 1913 and 1931 (as it did in Clackmannan), while the only recorded capital investment in Scottish mining during the 1920s and 1930s was made in the Lothians and in Fifeshire.⁽¹²⁾

9. P.M Long, 'The Economic and Social History of the Scottish Coal Industry, 1925-1939, with special reference to industrial relations,' Ph.D. thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1979, p.100. Long's thesis is the best available source for more information on the significance of the Lothian coalfields within the wider context of the Scottish coal industry.

10. Between 1881 and 1921 the population of the parish of Newbattle, in which Newtongrange was located, increased from 3,346 to 6,493. See below, pp.136-137

11. Annual Reports, Chief Inspector of Mines, 1919, Cmd.925 (1920).

12. R.H. Campbell, Scotland since 1707. The Rise of An Industrial Society (Oxford, 1971), p.254

TABLE 1:1

Numbers of Development Projects in Mid & East Lothian1921-1938

A - started, not completed

B - started and completed

C - in progress or sinking resumed

year	A	B	C
1921		2	
1922	1	1	
1923	1	1	
1924	1	1	
1925	1	1	
1926	1	1	
1927	1	2	1
1928		1	
1929		1	
1930		1	
1931 (nil)			
1932		1	
1933		2	
1934 (nil)			
1935	1		
1936	1		
1937	1		
1938		1	

Source: Annual Reports, Secretary of Mines, 1919-1938.

Note: The developments included one fire clay mine and one other registered under the Metaliferous Mines Registration Act. The sinking started in 1937 was abandoned later in the same year. Projects started in 1923 and 1927 were not new mines but deepening the shafts at Roslin(completed 1928). The work completed in 1938 was a multi-pit colliery, Dalkieth Nos 4,5 & 6.

Table 1:1 reveals that some development was taking place in most years in Mid and East Lothian, whereas in Somerset between 1919 and 1939 eight collieries were closed and the resulting decline in employment was only marginally offset by the opening of two small drift mines.(13)

13. Below, p.87

As WHB Court has emphasised, the regionalism of the coal industry was of particular importance between the wars because although the complex problems facing it were essentially national ones, the coal owners' response to difficult circumstances was largely shaped by local factors and events.⁽¹⁴⁾ In spite of the generally depressed state of trade for much of the period, new coalfields were developed (in Kent and the Dukeries⁽¹⁵⁾) and there was a marked regional variation in the experiences of established coalfields, with some areas doing relatively well while others went into rapid decline.⁽¹⁶⁾ In broad terms the exporting districts fared worse than those serving the domestic market but although the Lothian coal owners exported some 50 per cent of their product they operated in particularly favourable conditions and were far better placed in the inter-war scramble for markets than their counterparts in Somerset, who were so disadvantaged that as early as 1923 one authority aptly described the coalfield as having to fight more and more desperately for its very existence.⁽¹⁷⁾

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14. W.H.B. Court, 'Problems of the British Coal Industry Between the Wars, Economic History Review, 1st ser., Vol XV (1945), p.4; Court, History of the Second World War. Coal HMSO (1951), pp.4-5; B.Supple (ed.) The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol.4, 1913-1946, The Political Economy of Decline (Oxford, 1987), p.180; p.361.
15. H.S.Jevons, The British Coal Trade (1915), Chapter VI, 'The Kent Coalfields,' p.p. 155-75; G. Harkell, 'The Migration of Mining Families to the Kent Coalfield between the Wars', Oral History, 6(1) (1978); R.E.Goffee 'Essays in Oral History'. The Butty System and the Kent Coalfield', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No.34 (Spring, 1977), p.p.41-55; R.J. Waller, The Dukeries Transformed: The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield (Oxford, 1983).
16. Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, pp. 182-185.
17. J.W.F. Rowe, Wages in the Coal Industry, (1923), p.24.

In Somerset the most accessible seams had been worked out and physical conditions were becoming increasingly difficult in a coalfield always notorious for its complex geology, which had formed thin, heavily-faulted and often steeply-inclined seams⁽¹⁸⁾ Domestic fuel, gas and some steam coal were worked but there was no major coal-using industry in the rural area surrounding the mining district nor was there any large urban centre to create a sizeable stable market for house coal, such as Edinburgh provided for the Lothian companies. The city of Bath took most of its domestic supplies from Somerset but Bristol was served by its own small coalfield and by imports from South Wales. Because of the nature of the product and its highly variable quality there was no sustained demand from any specialised market, although gas works were increasingly important consumers, taking over 40 per cent of output by the 1940s.⁽¹⁹⁾ A considerable proportion of the coal was sold direct to the consumer⁽²⁰⁾ (thus saving the profits of middle-men) but there was intense competition among coal companies for the regional market, where they faced a constant threat from districts with lower costs of production.

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18. Anstie, Coalfields of Gloucestershire and Somerset; The Colliery Guardian, November 17, 1911, p.p.972-975. Further references can be found in the Bibliography to Down and Warrington History of the Somerset Coalfield, which itself contains a section of the geological formation of the coalfield in p.p.39-42. See below, f.p.69, geological section of the coalfield.
19. Regional Survey of the Coalfields, Bristol and Somerset, Ministry of Fuel and Power (1946), Table III, p.21. The statistics in the Table refer to disposals of coal in October 1943 but they were considered by the assessors to be fairly representative of the normal, pre-war trade.
20. One-third of output from the largest colliery (Norton Hill) accounted for land sales direct to the consumer in 1947. Some of the smaller collieries, such as the Marsh Lane drift mine, disposed of their total output through direct sales to domestic consumers delivered in the company lorry or lorries.

The situation was summed up by a colliery manager, who explained in a letter to the Somerset Guardian in 1931 that:

The district has already lost contracts and orders not only consequent upon the falling off of industrial demands in our home markets but also due to competition from those districts which have lost a portion of their export trade and, with very low shipping freights and also low railway rates from sea ports, have penetrated further than ever before into what has been looked upon as a market for Somerset coal. Sea-borne coal is actually reaching markets within a few miles of the Somerset coalfield at prices far below the cost of production and delivery from Somerset collieries. (21)

The high costs of production in Somerset made it almost impossible for companies to compete in the export market, although Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd. developed a small export trade for its steam coal during a brief period of the 1930s. Between January 1931 and December 1935 the Company exported a total of 4,408 tons (in quantities ranging from 19 tons to 1,586 tons per quarter) in its barge "William", to an unknown destination. (22)

21. Somerset Guardian, October 9, 1931. Railway charges on the carriage of coal increased rapidly in Britain after the first World War, whereas in many other countries preferential rates were charged on the carriage of coal. From the end of 1928 the Railway Freight Rebate Scheme operated in Britain. Many owners in inland districts, including Somerset, believed that the scheme encouraged the "dumping" of export coal in the home market. See N.K. Buxton, The Economic Development of the British Coal Industry (1978), pp. 170-71.

22. Beauchamp Papers, DD/BE/C/1933/3, Somerset Record Office.

The age of the Somerset collieries, the physical conditions and the longwall advancing method of work were all contributory factors to the high costs of production that made the collieries so vulnerable to competition from other districts. As a colliery developed and the distance from the coal face to the pit bottom grew, so the cost of haulage rose and extensive systems of roadways had to be maintained, with a large number of incline haulages to work the steepest seams. Approximately one ton of timber was used for every thirty to forty tons of coal raised and consequently timbering costs were exceptionally high in Somerset, where they were second only to wages in the total costs of production.⁽²³⁾ In some of the pits thirty tons of water were raised to every ton of coal and, furthermore, as much as one third of the material raised from a mine could be waste stone or other rubbish. Because of the low output, colliery consumption and standing changes were proportionally high. An additional handicap was that royalties and wayleave rates were above average. In 1925 13 per cent of the commercially disposable coal raised was chargeable at 1/- or more per ton, compared to 1.43 per cent of Great Britain's total tonnage chargeable at such rates. Throughout the period from 1925 to 1944 average royalties per ton paid in Somerset exceeded the national average, within a range from 1d. to 2.14d.⁽²⁴⁾

23. Sir Frank Beauchamp's evidence to the Sankey Commission included much information on costs of production in Somerset. His assertions about timbering costs are supported by figures in the annual statements of account of Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd., which reveal that they were second only to wages in total costs of production. Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, Vol. II, Reports and Minutes of Evidence (Second Stage), Cmd.360 (1919) p.p. 890-97; NCB/BP, Box numbers 5 and 6, SRO.

24. Regional Survey, Bristol and Somerset, pp. 62-63 and Table XXV1, p.62.

In marked contrast to Somerset, the Lothian coalfield as a whole had the best mining conditions in Scotland. Its costs of production were lower than in any other Scottish district and less than those of many English coalfields.⁽²⁵⁾ Much of the output came from seams over three feet in thickness and even relatively thin seams were comparatively flat (except at the edges of the coal basin) and virtually free of faults. The geology was thus a positive incentive to mechanisation because the physical conditions coincided with the state of technology in which mechanical mining proved most efficient and showed the greatest return on capital investment.⁽²⁶⁾

The competitive advantage of low costs of production was enhanced by the geographical location of the Lothian coalfield, for its proximity to Edinburgh and to the coast meant that transport costs to the market were relatively low. The mixed economy of the region,⁽²⁷⁾ the demand for house coal in the Scottish capital and for bunkering fuel for shipping using the docks at Leith and Granton created a market that to some extent 'cushioned' the Lothian coal owners against the vagaries of the export trade.

25. A.Connor, Coal in Decline (Glasgow,1962), passim. The geology of the Lothian coalfield is considered in the Report, Scottish Coalfield Commission, pp.35-37 and pp.85-90. For a general survey of the geology of the Scottish coalfields see Jevons British Coal Trade, pp.143-54; A.W.Dron, The Coalfields of Scotland (1902) and Dron, The Economics of Coalmining(1928).

26. Long, 'Economic and Social History of the Scottish Coal Industry', p.100. Long also comments on the Lothian coal owners' careful planning, emphasis on technical efficiency and severe cost cutting.

27. East Lothian was an essentially agricultural district with a chain of golfing and holiday resorts around its coast but there were small industries in places such as Tranent and Prestonpans. South of Edinburgh, in Midlothian, there were many industrial towns but all of a modest size. See C.A.Oakley, Scottish Industry Today, (Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 133-34.

About 50 per cent of total output was exported pre-1914, most of it to Scandinavian and Baltic ports although some went to France and Italy. The departmental committee which investigated conditions in the coal trade in 1915 concluded that the Lothians would be 'hard hit' by war time disruption of the export trade but it was acknowledged that the district 'had a good home market for the balance'.⁽²⁸⁾ In 1924, after the temporary benefits of a strike in the American coal industry and the opportunities created by the French occupation of the Ruhr, the Scottish export trade virtually collapsed. Shipments fell by 20 per cent in 1925 and in the following year the lengthy dispute in the mining industry resulted in foreign producers taking over some traditional British markets. Nonetheless, nearly 50 per cent of output was still being exported from the Lothians in the particularly depressed financial year 1931-1932, which suggests that the Lothian owners managed to retain their share of the export market until the general (albeit gradual) improvement in the overseas trade that followed from various international trade agreements and a marketing arrangement made with Polish coal owners.⁽²⁹⁾

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28. Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Prevailing in the Mining Industry Due to the War, First Report, Part II (Evidence and Index), Cd.8009, XXVIII(1914-1916) On January 24th, 1924, the Colliery Guardian reported a 'better demand of late' for Lothian steam coal, with shipments to France, Italy, Germany and South America. Colliery Guardian, Vol.127, Jan - June 1924.
29. R.H. Campbell has argued that Scottish coal producers sold abroad after the first World War more by default of their competitors than by their own achievements. Campbell, Scotland Since 1707, p.254. Cf. Buxton, Economic Development of the Coal Industry, pp.168-73. See also Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, pp.284-91.

The Lothian companies were not, however, immune from the effects of the inter-war depression. Edinburgh Collieries Ltd. was reported to be in a state of 'financial embarrassment' by the autumn of 1933⁽³⁰⁾ and economic circumstances did restrict development in the coalfield. The Summerlee Iron Company, for example, was bound by the terms of its lease of undersea minerals from the Crown Lands Commission to sink a new pit by Whitsuntide 1930 but, in view of the state of the market and having traded at a loss of £100,000 in the financial year 1927-1928, the Company was anxious to renegotiate its lease. The Commissioners' inspector adopted a sympathetic attitude and recommended that the sinking should be delayed for two years, stating in support of his recommendation the belief that it was 'desirable for all colliery companies to nurse their liquid assets as far as possible until they can see their way through this abnormal depression'.⁽³¹⁾

Between 1923 and 1944 some exhausted pits closed in the Lothians and several of the smaller companies went out of business but the structure of the industry remained virtually unchanged whereas the inter-war period in Somerset witnessed the rise to power and prominence of Sir Frank Beauchamp and his company, Somerset Collieries Ltd (SCL).

30. Coal 12/77, Public Record Office. Resume of progress towards amalgamations in the Lothians, note dated September 9, 1933. See below, p.43.

31. CB/28/17/3, West Register House, Edinburgh, Annual Reports to the Office of Commissioners for Crown Lands (Crown Undersea Mines) Prestongrange, the Summerlee Iron Co. Ltd. (1925-1942). Report by Mr. Foster Brown, March 9, 1928.

TABLE 1 : II

Colliery Ownership in Somerset, 1919

<u>Owner/Company</u>	<u>Collieries</u>
Bishop Sutton Colliery Co. Clutton Collieries Clutton Coal Co. Dunkerton Colliery Ltd. Captain William Vaughan-Jenkins & H. Alger Old Mills Colliery Co. John Iles Radstock Collieries Ltd.	Bishop Sutton Clutton or Burchells Dunkerton* Priston of Tunley* Old Mills, Springfield Clandown* Ludlows*, Middlepit*, Wellsway* Writhlington, Kilmersdon Pensford Bromley Farrington (B) Norton Hill Braysdown, Camerton Mells Newbury Morewood (B) New Rock (B)
Writhlington Collieries Ltd. Pensford & Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd. Farrington Collieries Co. Norton Hill Colliery Co. Sir Frank Beauchamp Mells Collieries Ltd. Newbury Collieries Ltd. Morewood Colliery Co. Ltd. New Rock Colliery Co.	

Source : Compiled from C.G. Down & A.J. Warrington, The History of the Somerset Coalfield (Newton Abbot, 1971).

Note : Collieries marked * were owned by Sir Frank Beauchamp at some time between 1919 and 1947. Those marked (B) were owned by other members of the Beauchamp family, with Farrington owned jointly in partnership by Frank and Louis Beauchamp.

TABLE 1 : IIA

Colliery Ownership in Somerset, 1940

<u>Company</u>	<u>Collieries</u>
Somerset Collieries Ltd. (Sir Frank Beauchamp) William Evans (Old Mills Collieries) Ltd. Pensford & Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd. Writhlington Collieries Ltd. New Rock Colliery Co. Ltd. Charmborough Collieries Ltd. Marsh Lane Colliery	Norton Hill, Ludlows, Camerton, Braysdown Old Mills New Mills Pensford Bromley Writhlington, Kilmersdon New Rock (B) Charmborough (B) Marsh Lane

Source : Compiled from the Regional Survey, 1946.

Note: Pits marked (B) were owned by members of the Beauchamp family, other than Sir Frank Beauchamp. For detailed information on the changing structure of ownership over time in the two coalfields see the list of Mines published actually by the Mines Inspectorate.

TABLE 1:III

Colliery Ownership in Mid and East Lothian, 1923 and 1944

<u>Company/Owner</u>	<u>Collieries</u>	
	1923 ----	1944 ----
Arniston Coal Co. Ltd.	Arniston	Arniston
Edinburgh Colliery Co Ltd.	Carberry Wallyford Bankton Bellyford Ephinstone (Fleets) Prestonlinks	Carberry (pumping) Wallyford (pumping) Bankton (pumping) Fleets Prestonlinks
Fordel Mains (Midlothian) Colliery Co. Ltd.	Fordel Mains	Fordel Mains Edgehead
Lothian Coal Co. Ltd.	Newbattle Polton Whitehill	Newbattle Collieries Polton (pumping) Whitehill
A.G. Moore & Co, Ltd.	Cowden No. 2 Cowden No. 3 Dalkieth	Dalkieth Dalkieth Nos 4,5,6. Dalkieth Nos 8,9,10.
Niddrie and Benhar Coal Co. Ltd.	Newcraighall Woolmet	
Ormiston Coal Ltd.	Niddrie Oxenford Limeylands	Oxenford No. 2 Limeylands, Tynemount
G. Paul & Sons Ltd.*	Vogrie	
Pumphreston Oil Co. Ltd.*	Cobbinshaw No.1 Cobbinshaw No.2 Pumphreston No.5	
Shotts Iron Co. Ltd.	Loanhead Roslin	Roslin Ramsay Burghlee

TABLE 1:III (continued)

<u>Company/Owner</u>	<u>Collieries</u>	
	<u>1923</u> -----	<u>1944</u> -----
Earl of Stair	Edgehead	
United Collieries Ltd.	Longlea No.2 Woodmuir	
Young's Paraffin Light & Mineral Oil Co. Ltd.*	Baads No.42 Gavieside No.40 Polbeth No.6 Ingliston No.36 Limefield	
Summerlee Iron Co. Ltd.	Prestongrange	Prestongange
Udston Colliery Co. Ltd.	Penston No.3	
A. White and Co. Ltd.	Tyneside No.2	
Woodhall Coal Co. Ltd.	Pencaitland	Pencaitland (1)
Glimerton Coal Co. Ltd.		Glimerton
Cornton Coal Co. Ltd.		Cornton
William Gordon		Penkaet
Glencairn Coal Co. Ltd.		Glencairn (2)

Source: Compiled from A Storer Cunningham Mining in Mid and East Lothian (Edinburgh, 1923) and the Report of the Scottish Coalfields Commission, Cmd 6575 (Edinburgh, 1944).

* Shale oil mines

(1) Closed by 1944

(2) Not in production in 1939

The coalowners⁽³³⁾ of Somerset were not an homogenous group. They included aristocrats such as Lord Waldegrave and the Earl of Warwick in the immediate post war years, the benevolent Lady Horner of Mells Estates later in the period, working miners running a co-operative drift mine, a previous Chief Inspector of Mines (Sir Richard Redmayne) and a proprietor of southcoast amusement arcades.⁽³⁴⁾ The Pensford and Bromley pits, however, were owned and directed by a partnership of five or six local business men and minor landed gentry, the sort of partnership that was fairly typical of the nineteenth century although the Company was actually one of the few twentieth century concerns in the Somerset coal industry. It was established in 1909 to sink the Pensford pit but the benefits of late development that were so apparent in the Lothians did not accrue to this Somerset firm. The sinking was fraught with problems caused by flooding and after it was completed the geological conditions proved to be more difficult than had been anticipated. Output per man shift

33. A somewhat neglected topic but see L.J. Williams, 'The Coalowners' in D. Smith (ed.) A People and a Proletariat (1980), p.p. 94-113

34. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, passim. Beauchamp bought out the Waldegraves shortly after the first World War, while the Earl of Warwick's involvement came to an end in 1921 with the closure of his collieries in Clutton. See below, p.84, for more on Lady Horner and p.87, on the Marsh Lane drift. Sir Richard Redmayne (highly knowledgeable about the coal industry and author of several books on the subject) became a director of New Mells Colliery Co.Ltd. in 1937. In 1938 the Company bought substantial shares in William Evans & Co. (Old Mills Collieries) Ltd. and Redmayne also became a director of that company. For further information on Redmayne see appropriate entry in Who Was Who, 1941-1950, Vol IV, (1964;1967;1980), also 'Men of Note in the British Coal Industry. No.13, Sir R.A.S. Redmayne', Colliery Guardian, October 5, 1923. John Iles, proprietor of a firm called Dreamland Margate, owned Clandown colliery from 1917 until 1924, when Sir Frank Beauchamp bought it as a preliminary step towards purchasing the Duchy of Cornwall minerals as a whole.

(with a workforce of 270-333) averaged 4.5 tons to 5.5 tons for much of the pit's working life.⁽³⁵⁾ Losses mounted until the directors dissolved the company in 1921, to enable them to re-negotiate their sixty year mineral lease on more favourable terms. A new company, Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd., was formed, its prospects enhanced by the royalty owner's agreement to accept only half the usual fee per ton for the next ten years.⁽³⁶⁾ The Company showed a pre-tax profit in 1921 but thereafter most statements of annual accounts showed a loss and the pit did not make regular profits until the second World War.⁽³⁷⁾ Stringent cost cutting was achieved in the Pensford and Bromley pits, by frequent reminders to managers and officials of the 'need for the strictest economy in all departments'⁽³⁸⁾ while investment was made in development work, mechanisation and the purchase of plant for preparing the product for the market. Most of the capital expenditure was made in the 1930s and the bulk of it went on mechanical coal cutters and conveyors, on electricity generators and building a washery at Pensford⁽³⁹⁾. Substantial sums of money were also spent on an unsuccessful attempt to open up the Bromley seams so that they could be worked from Pensford Colliery, which was nearer the railway line.⁽⁴⁰⁾

35. *ibid.*, p. 64.

36. BT/31/CRO, PRO, Diss. 173001.

37. NCB/BP, Box Nos 5 and 6, SRO, Annual Reports and Statements of Account, June 30, 1921-1939.

38. *ibid.*, Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Directors, Pensford Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd., June 8, 1921.

39. *ibid.*, Annual Reports, 1921-1939.

40. In 1914 it was costing the company 2d. per ton to transport coal from Bromley by way of a rope haulage tram line (over a distance of two miles or so) to the railway line at Pensford colliery. The tramline remained in use until Bromley pit was closed by the N.C.B. in 1957.

Conflict arose directly out of the aims and strategies of the owners, centring on disputes associated with mechanisation, enforced overtime and a determined attempt to impose a colliery-based wage rate⁽⁴¹⁾ but one aspect of company policy antagonised the other Somerset owners rather than the workforce. Intra-regional competition was always intense in the district and particularly so before the Mines Act of 1930 introduced the quota system,⁽⁴²⁾ so it was a source of considerable vexation to others (and especially to Sir Frank Beauchamp) that the managing director of Pensford and Bromley Collieries was always eager 'to sell his coal for whatever he could get in order to keep his pits working, with a consequent depression of prices all round'.⁽⁴³⁾

In the Writhlington group, as at Pensford and Bromley, some of the face work and haulage was mechanised between 1919 and 1939

41. Below, p.p.74-5.

42. Part One of the Coal Mines Act 1930 created machinery for regulating the production, supply and sale of coal. A central council allocated the maximum output allowed to each of twenty one districts. District councils then determined how the quota should be distributed among individual mines and the same body also fixed a minimum price for all grades of coal produced in its area. See p.41, f.n.66, for a brief account of the various parts of the Act. Papers relating to colliery allocations and agreed minimum prices in Somerset can be found in the largely unsorted archive DD/BE/C, SRO. The Somerset District (Coal Mines) Scheme, 1930, is reproduced in full in the Miners Federation of Great Britain Annual Proceedings, 1929-30, pp. 1833-845. The various parts of the Act and its weakness are examined in Buxton, Economic Development of the Coal Industry, pp.208-12.

43. COAL 12/62, PRO, Misc. papers of the Coal Mines Reorganisation Committee (Somerset), Sir Ernest Gower's note of this and other comments made by Sir Frank Beauchamp at their meeting on February 19, 1931.

but the combination of adverse physical conditions, the availability of labour and the owners' ability to depress wage rates meant that there was little incentive to mechanise⁽⁴⁴⁾ particularly in a coalfield that was almost certainly under-capitalised and in which investment in development work was of a higher order of risk than it was in the extractive industries generally. In some coalfields (such as Lanarkshire, in Scotland) it was standard practice to push forward exploration work continuously so as to at all times keep in hand areas of proved coal equal to at least two years working but in Somerset exploratory work was usually carried on sufficient to ensure the maintenance of a steady output, and that was the dominant consideration. Indeed, under private ownership most of the Somerset pits were worked to their limits (taking the most accessible, easily worked coal but leaving areas of less-accessible or poorer-quality coal scattered over the royalty) and few had more than a relatively short life expectancy by the time the industry was nationalised in 1947. However long term prospects, rather than short term gains, seem to have been the priority in the Writhlington group for its two main collieries (Lower Writhlington, sunk in 1829, and Kilmersdon, developed in the 1870s) were the last pits to close in Somerset, in 1973.

44. Beauchamp told the Sankey Commission that his experiments with coal cutters and mechanical conveyers had not increased output or reduced costs. Some of the constraints to mechanisation are discussed in M.K.Kirby, N.K. Buxton and W. Johnson, 'Entreprenurial Efficiency in the British Coal Industry Between the Wars', Ec. Hist. Review, Vol.25 (1972), pp. 655-73. For the general extent of mechanisation see D. Greasely, 'The Diffusion of Machine Cutting in the British Coal Industry, 1902-1938', Explorations in Economic History, Vol.19, No.3 (1982), pp.246-68. See also 'Coal Conveyors in Scottish Mines', Colliery Guardian, Vol.126 (1923), p.1554.

The Company was owned by a partnership of some six persons and it was the most powerful group outside of Beauchamp's growing empire. The core directors in the inter-war period were the descendants of the nineteenth century founders of the firm but despite this continuity of family interests few of the directors were known by name to their workforce. (The one exception to this was the company secretary, Alban Chivers, who was nicknamed 'Artful' Chivers by the miners). The Writhlington group, however, is frequently recalled as the one that had the best management in the coalfield, with a reputation for high safety standards and efficient organisation. Not only were safety regulations strictly enforced but practices unheard of in other Somerset pits were routine in the Withlington group, such as a daily inspection of all shaft linings and the permanent employment of a man on the night shift for the sole purpose of whitewashing the 'manholes' or refugees along the roadways. In many of the district's pits timber was cut by hand, on occasions by face workers sent up to get what they needed and not infrequently by miners before they went underground to start their shift. In contrast, the supply, preparation and distribution of timber was efficiently organised in the Writhlington group, where pit props of various dimensions were cut at a central workshop and taken to the collieries by truck.

As miners who worked at Writhlington and Kilmersdon often point out, the Company's policies served the interests of both employers and employees. The emphasis on safe working practices made these pits 'some of the best to work in' while the low accident rate reduced absenteeism caused by minor injuries and also cut the costs of workmen's compensation.

Similarly, loss of production for the owners and of wages for the miners on piece rates, caused by shortages of timber, were avoided in the Writhlington group. Moreover the workforce was consulted over arrangements for short time working and other matters. In 1928 the Company installed the first conveyer at Kilmersdon, in direct response to the Somerset Miners Association's campaign against the guss.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Such a conciliatory style of management was in marked contrast to the dictatorial and authoritarian regime that prevailed in Somerset Collieries Ltd. (SCL), which Sir Frank Beauchamp ran in a manner reminiscent of a Victorian mill-owner. The Beauchamp firm was founded in the second half of the nineteenth century, by William Beachim.⁽⁴⁶⁾ When Beachim died in 1894 he left his three sons a substantial inheritance and a more grandiose name, having adopted the title "William Beachim Beauchamp" in the 1870s. His eldest son, Frank (who had trained as a colliery manager in one of the family pits), inherited most of the coal interests but in 1896 he went into partnership with his brother Louis to reopen Norton Hill Colliery. Frank and Louis Beauchamp also worked in partnership a mine at Farrington Gurney and the Radstock Coal and Wagon Company. Both brothers had mining interests in the Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire) and in addition Frank Beauchamp was owner of East Bristol Collieries Ltd. from 1919 until 1948, although production came to an end in that part of the Bristol coalfield during the late 1930s.

45. See below, p.104.

46. The origins of the Beauchamp family and an account of their rise to prominence in Somerset is the subject of Chapter Twelve, 'Beauchamp's Gold Mine', pp.212-224 in Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield.

Louis Beauchamp and his son Guy bought New Rock colliery in 1920 and Louis also owned Morewood colliery from 1924 until its closure in 1932. William Beauchamp's third son, Walter, had no mining interests but his four sons ran the Mells Quarry Company and formed a partnership in the early 1930s to develop a drift mine at Charmborough.

Colonel Sir Frank Beauchamp (CBE, JP), created the first Baronet in 1918⁽⁴⁷⁾ was the most powerful member of this dynastic elite and he exerted a strong influence on the Somerset coal industry between the wars. Already a mature man of over fifty when the first World War ended, he carried into the post-war era a set of values, attitudes and ambitions formed in a more expansionist age of the coal industry's history but subtly shaped by his long experience of the peculiar difficulties of mining in Somerset and by the more recent experience of state control. Although he was strongly opposed to nationalisation of the industry, it seems that Beauchamp was favourably impressed by some effects of government control during war time.⁽⁴⁸⁾ His views on the future of the coalfield were forcefully expounded to the Sankey Commission in 1919, when he suggested that the three small districts of Somerset, Bristol and the Forest of Dean (in all of which he was a major colliery owner) could be most efficiently run as one unit.

47. Frank Beauchamp (b.1866; d.1950) served for eighteen years in the Somerset Volunteer and Territorial Forces, retiring with the honorary rank of Major. In 1915 he joined the regular Army but retired with the rank of Colonel when sent 'on special service' to America. He was made a baronet in 1918 and awarded a CBE in 1919. Who Was Who 1941-1950, Vol.IV (1964; 1967; 1980) p.78.

48. As were many coal owners in other small, marginal coalfields. See Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, p.157, f.n.i.

His primary aim, however, was to amalgamate the collieries in Somerset, to maintain the local industry against competition by achieving commercial economies and economies of large-scale production. He envisaged a central generating station to provide all colliery power, a central pumping station, and an organisation to deal with selling prices, distribution and the purchase of supplies. It was his firm opinion that some sort of unification was the only way that Somerset could withstand competition and although he acknowledged the argument for concentrating production in the most geologically favourable areas, he dismissed it on the grounds that it would be 'nothing short of a calamity' for the nation if high-cost districts went out of production.⁽⁴⁹⁾

In 1925 Beauchamp consolidated his various interests by forming Somerset Collieries Ltd., with a capital of £50,000, himself as chairman and his two young sons (Douglas b.1903; Ian b.1907) as directors.⁽⁵⁰⁾ A second SCL was promoted at the end of 1935 (under the Mining Industry Act, 1926) as a public company with a capital of £375,000,⁽⁵¹⁾ made up of Norton Hill Collieries Ltd., Radstock Coal and Wagon Company, Radstock Gas Works, Radstock Collieries Ltd. and some coal leases not incorporated in 1925. Sir Frank Beauchamp had held the controlling interest in all the Beauchamp pits run as independent partnerships before 1925 and his position remained fundamentally unaltered by subsequent changes in company structure.

49. R.C. on the Coal Industry, Vol.2, Reports and Minutes of Evidence (Second Stage), Cmd 360 (1919), p.894.

50. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield p213-14

51. See COAL 12/64, (PRO), for more detailed information on the formation of the second SCL.

Very little development work was done by the Company and the pits that came under its control were not extensively modernised or mechanised but by buying up collieries and mining leases Beauchamp substantially increased SCL's reserves. He also raised the percentage of mining royalties owned by the company from around 3 per cent in the 1920s to 23 per cent by 1935. The proportion of the Somerset coalfields' output that came from the collieries owned by Beauchamp increased from one third in 1919 to 43 per cent by the 1930s and at the end of that decade 35 per cent of the total workforce was employed at the four mines controlled by SCL.⁽⁵²⁾ Rationalisation of the industry in Somerset was not, however, accompanied by substantial investment and at the time of nationalisation in 1947 the coalfield was the least mechanised, most technologically backward district in the whole country, with the lowest output and the highest costs. Beauchamp's seemingly aggressive policies were, of course, essentially defensive. They were aimed primarily at protecting and promoting the interests of Somerset Collieries Ltd. but he was also continuously concerned to defend the Somerset coal industry against competition from other districts. His policies did not make him popular with the miners (buying up collieries and not working them seems to have been widely regarded as a dereliction of duty on the part of the coal owner) and his relations with other coal owners were frequently acrimonious. It was not until he had firmly established the dominance of SCL that he played a full part in the employers' organisation.

52. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, loc cit .

The Somerset Coal Owners Association had been in existence since the latter half of the nineteenth century but not all of the employers in the district belonged to it in 1919. Sir Frank Beauchamp was a member for a brief period during the first World War but he withdrew from the organisation in the early 1920s. He refused to attend a preliminary meeting called to discuss setting up a Wages Board at the end of the 1921 dispute⁽⁵³⁾ because he objected to the coalfield being divided into two districts with lower wage rates in the Mells and Newbury area (in the south of the coalfield). His argument that this would enable the Mells and Newbury owners to undercut those in the Radstock district was challenged by Egbert Spear, Chairman of the Wages Board and of SCOA. Spear had interests in both parts of the district (as managing director of Dunkerton Collieries and also of Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd) and he pointed out that wage rates had customarily varied between the two parts of the coalfield but he insisted that neither the men nor the owners had ever suffered as a result.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Thereafter, Beauchamp joined the Wages Board but only until the court of inquiry (set up to investigate

53. The industry was somewhat hastily de-controlled on March 31, 1921, because of the collapse in the export market and rapidly rising cost of subsidies. The removal of subsidies was followed by an attempt by the owners to reduce wages and impose district settlements. A lock out ensued, from April to July 1921. The Government favoured the idea of a National Wages Board to supervise district wage agreements and offered a subsidy (at the end of April) if a settlement was achieved. The offer was rejected by the owners but the terms of the national agreement that settled the dispute on July 1, 1921 provided for the establishment of national and district wages boards. Proposed Terms of Settlement of The Dispute in the Coal Mining Industry, June 28, 1921, Cmd.1387 (1921).

54. Minutes, Somerset Wages Board, Somerset Miners Association records, Bristol University Library (Special Collections), September 26, 1921.

wages in 1924)⁽⁵⁵⁾ proposed that wages should be the first charge on the industry, with standard profits set at 15 per cent of the standard wages and any surplus to be divided between wages and profits in the ratio of 88:12. The Somerset coal owners were united in their objections to the interventionist principle involved in the proposal,

Which is that someone shall be allowed to draw up onerous terms and then say that we must pay them or close down. The coal owners must be at liberty to arrange mutual terms with the workmen to keep the pits working.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Beauchamp insisted that to accept the proposal would create a situation in which every coalfield in the country would be able to undercut Somerset and still make a profit, whereas refusing to cooperate would benefit everyone in the district because

'when owners do well the miners do well, their interests are identical'.

No national agreement would be acceptable unless it provided for 'varying minimums for varying districts' and, indeed, it would have been the farce that the Chairman of SCOA, Egbert Spear, suggested if the employers' organisation had signed an agreement that was not binding on the employers who were not members of SCOA.

At this point, Sir Frank Beauchamp announced that he had ceased forthwith to be a member of any board or association, the membership of which could be taken as binding him to any agreement with anyone. The Wages Board met only intermittently

55. The dislocation caused by the French occupation of the Ruhr brought a temporary improvement in the trade and during the mini-boom of 1923-24, the M.F.G.B. pressed a wage claim and threatened strike action. The owners' offer was rejected and a court of inquiry was set up, which supported the Federations' claim. The courts' findings are set out in Report of the Court of Inquiry, Concerning Wages in the Coal industry, Cmd. 2129, XI (1924).

56. Minutes, Somerset Wages Board, June 24, 1924.

until the end of 1925 and in the aftermath of the 1926 dispute (during which Beauchamp was instrumental in the formation of a "non-political" union in Somerset)⁽⁵⁷⁾ the Somerset Coal Owners Association effectively ignored the Somerset Miners Association, by-passing it in its dealings with labour and virtually forcing the union to re-fight the late nineteenth century battle for recognition. Once he had consolidated his position as the major coal owner in the district, Beauchamp exerted his influence over events by taking a more active part in various organisations. He became Chairman of SCOA, a group of four or five employers which he publicly described in 1936 as 'not a very difficult team to drive'.⁽⁵⁸⁾ When a Wages Board was eventually established, in the late 1930s, he also became chairman of that body. The six representatives of SCOA on the Wages Board included Sir Frank Beauchamp's son (Ian Beauchamp), his nephew (Guy Beauchamp) and two managers of collieries within the SCL group.⁽⁵⁹⁾

The relationship of the Lothian Coal Owners Association with the Mid and East Lothian Miners Association was very different to that of SCOA and the SMA. Although there was a long tradition of meetings between colliery owners and miners in the Lothians, to negotiate over wages and conditions, no formal employers' organisation existed until as late as 1913. James Hood of the Lothian Coal Company (son of Archibald Hood) became chairman of

57. See below, p.210.

58. Beauchamp described SCOA thus in an after-dinner speech to the Institute of Mining Engineers in Bath, in the summer of 1936. Transactions Inst. M.E., Vol. XCL, 91 (1935-36), p.p. 416-15.

59. Minutes, Somerset Wages Board, June 27, 1938

LCOA at its formation in that year until 1920 when Adam Nimmo took over as chairman, a position he retained until 1926. Nimmo was a major figure in the coal industry, Chairman of the Scottish Coal Owners Association and a member of the Advisory Board to the Coal Controller during the period of government control of the mining industry in the first World War.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In 1923 twelve out of a possible maximum of eighteen Lothian coal companies were members of LCOA and therefore represented (through their affiliated membership) in the Scottish Coal Owners Association.⁽⁶¹⁾

The topic of trade unionism has its place in a later chapter but two regional factors that influenced the relationship between LCOA and MELMA and the attitude of LCOA to the district union are worth mentioning here. Firstly, the crucial matter of wage rates was removed from the local agenda in the Lothians because the Scottish coalfields were treated as one district. Negotiations and agreements over wages were therefore conducted at national level between the Scottish Coal Owners Association and the Scottish Mineworkers Federation. Secondly, the growth of the communist breakaway-union, the United Mineworkers of Scotland,

60. Nimmo's main interests were in Lanarkshire, where he was the leading coal owner. He became 'expert' advisor to the Coal Controller, serving in a private capacity not as a representative of the MAGB. He was a late substitute to the Sankey Commission in 1919, where he strengthened the anti-public ownership representation. In 1926 he was in the forefront of the assault on wages and hours. Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, passim.

61. Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, chapter Eleven, 'Lothian Coal Owners Association', pp.87-91. See Table I:III, p.p.24-5. The maximum number (eighteen) discounts companies marked *, which worked shale-oil mines.

encouraged employers and managers to adopt a fairly benevolent attitude to the official union. Membership of MELMA was positively encouraged as a means of reducing the influence of the politically-radical and industrially-militant UMS. However, if circumstances in the Lothians (such as the stage of capital development, the comparable strength of many of the companies and the relative lack of intra-regional competition) were conducive to cooperation between the coal owners, they nonetheless shared to some extent the individualism that was so characteristic of coal owners in general. They resisted state pressure to amalgamate in the inter-war years but their collieries were models of efficiency by the end of the period, judged by the standards recommended by the Technical Advisory Committee in the Reid Report.⁽⁶²⁾ Yet the Scottish Coalfields Commission, reporting in 1944, questioned whether or not the coalfield had been developed to its capacity and concluded that the history and individualistic outlook of the Lothian coal owners had led to short-term policies being pursued along the lines of narrow self-interest.⁽⁶³⁾

62. Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Coal Mining, 'The Reid Report', Cmd. 6610 (1945)

63. Report, Scottish Coalfields Commission, p. 105.

Similar views have been expressed by some historians about the coal industry in general⁽⁶⁴⁾ and it has been commonly argued that the failure of the amalgamation movement between the wars can be accounted for almost entirely by the intransigence and extreme individualism of the coal owners. It may be that the case against them has been overstated but the attempts of the Coal Mines Reorganisation Committee to bring about amalgamations in Somerset and the Lothians certainly foundered on individualistic attitudes as much as on opposition based firmly on any economic rationale. The general pattern of ownership was one major influence on attitudes to proposed amalgamations, although the level of intra-regional competition, the comparative strengths of the coal companies and the incidence of shared directorships were other factors which could foster either co-operation or hostility between the owners in a particular coalfield. Most of the amalgamations completed in the inter-war period were brought about by local voluntary agreements, even though two major pieces of legislation embodied coercive powers to enforce mergers between reluctant coal owners.

The Mining Act of 1921 established rationalisation as official policy for the first time but it made relatively little impact on the industry.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The Coal Mines Act of 1930 was far more

64. The debate is covered in Kirby et.al. 'Entrepreneurial efficiency in the British Coal Industry between the wars'. See also Buxton, Economic Development in the British Coal Industry, part four (9), 'Structure and Organisation Between the Wars', p.p.207-12., cf. Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, Chapter 9 'Coal Enterprises and Coal Owners, 1913-1939', p.p.361-424.

65. Buxton, Economic Development of the Coal Industry, p.208.

influential, especially Parts 1 and 11 of the Act.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The objectives of these two Parts were, however, almost diametrically opposed. The quota system introduced under Part 1 gave all collieries a share of the market and thus prevented some job losses in the industry but it encouraged the survival of inefficient concerns. The aim of Part 11 was to enforce amalgamations and, had it not in effect been a failure, the concentration of production would certainly have raised even further the level of unemployment in mining. Nonetheless, the Coal Mines Reorganisation Committee, established under Part 11 of the Act (chaired by Sir Ernest Gowers), set about its task with considerable energy.

In the spring of 1931 Sir Ernest Gowers visited Somerset where he met Egbert Spear, managing director and designated owner of Pensford and Bromley Collieries and secretary of the Coal Owners Association. He found Spear 'very friendly' but somewhat

66. Part 1 was concerned with the regulation of production, supply and sale of coal; Part 11 established the Coal Mines Reorganisation Committee to secure the rationalisation of the industry; Parts III and IV reduced hours of work from eight to seven and a half per day and made provision for setting up a Coal Mines Industrial Board to inquire into disputes in the industry. For some contemporary views of the Act see D.H MacGregor, 'The Coal Bill', Economic Journal (1930), pp. 35-44; J.H. Jones, G. Cartwright and P.H. Guenault, The Coal-mining Industry (1938) in which the operation of Part I of the Act is the subject of chapter IX and Part II is considered in chapter 1, especially pp 63-7.

ambivalent about the notion of reorganisation. As secretary of the SCOA, Spear declared himself opposed to the idea but he expressed the private opinion that there would ultimately have to be total unification if the coalfield was to continue working. However:

He thought that at present individualism was too strong to make it practicable to attempt any such thing.....He said he would gladly arrange for us to meet his colleagues ...but he begged that things might be allowed to develop gradually in their own way.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Gowers later met Sir Frank Beauchamp (in his role as chairman of the Bristol Coal Owners Association⁽⁶⁸⁾) but no further attempts were made at this stage to persuade the Somerset owners to co-operate with the CMRC, although it is not clear why the matter was not pursued. Meanwhile, the committee was busy in other areas, including the Lothians. At a meeting held in Edinburgh in 1931 'practically all' of the coal owners of Mid and East Lothian declared themselves opposed to any amalgamations, apparently because of straightforward financial considerations.

67. COAL 12/62, PRO, Somerset, notes of a meeting between Sir Ernest Gowers and Egbert Spear, n.d., c.1931. Gowers was Director of Production, Coal Mines Department, 1919-20 and Permanent Under-Secretary of Mines from 1920 to 1927. He was Chairman of the Coal Mines Reorganisation Committee from 1930 to 1935 and from 1938 to 1946 he was Chairman of the Coal Commission. Who Was Who, Vol VI, 1961-70 (1972), pp. 443-44.

68. COAL 12/62, PRO, Gower's notes of a meeting with Sir Frank Beauchamp, February 19, 1931. There was actually very little discussion of the Bristol Coalfield at the meeting, because Sir Frank quickly 'disposed of it' by saying it was very doubtful if the two existing companies would continue for many more years and meanwhile 'they had a friendly understanding and worked together effectively in matters of price quotation'.

Gowers noted that 'the dominating factors in this area were the prosperity of the Lothian Coal Company (who would prefer amalgamation with Fife Coal Company rather than with their neighbours in the Lothians) and the financial embarrassment of Edinburgh Collieries'.⁽⁶⁹⁾ In spite of this, early in 1932 the CMRC selected Mid and East Lothian for an experimental exercise in preparing a unification plan which, it was hoped, would be acceptable to owners of the principle collieries. The scheme devised by the Reorganisation Committee's team of mining engineers and accountants proposed the formation of a marketing company, which was to be 'partly a holding company and partly an operating one' but owners of the less-prosperous companies refused to consider the plan and by 1933 the prospects of it being voluntarily adopted were not promising.⁽⁷⁰⁾

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69. COAL 12/77, PRO, Lothians, Resume of Progress Towards Amalgamations, note, September 9, 1933. It seems likely that the Fife Coal Company shared the interest of the Lothian Coal Company in a possible amalgamation. C. Augustus Carlow (managing director of the Fife Coal Company from 1917 to 1939) wrote privately to Sir Ernest Gowers on March 23, 1932, about reorganisation but he expressed himself in such discreet terms that it is difficult to elucidate the precise meaning of the letter. Carlow opened the correspondence by stating that 'as this is a personal letter, not for the records of your Department, I am sending it from my home address to your club' and he went on to refer to 'the position which may arise on the South Side of the Firth of Forth'. It is not clear whether this referred to amalgamation within the Lothians, or between the two companies. (COAL 12/78, PRO, Lothians, Informal Meetings with Representatives of the Coal Industry, Correspondence and Proceedings is a disappointingly uninformative file. The bulk of it is made up of correspondence concerning dates of proposed meetings.)
70. Annual Reports on the working of Part 1 of the Coal Mines Act (1930), Cmd 4468 (1933).

By now, underlying motives for opposition were emerging and the Committee concluded that 'the difficulties of reconciling the owners to a policy of closer integration are accentuated by the predominance of family interests in five of the larger concerns (Lothian, Ormiston, Arniston, Moore and Summerlee), some of whom have interests in other coalfields'.⁽⁷¹⁾ Strong family interests were highly likely to be associated with a reluctance to lose control of a company and to allow its identity to be submerged in a larger organisation. Moreover, the threat of forced mergers probably exacerbated the coal owners' antipathy to state intervention and strengthened their individualism, in the face of what could be perceived as a challenge to their right to manage the industry. Unification or partial amalgamation plans were also prepared for the Forest of Dean and South-West Lancashire but the owners in those districts would not accept them either. The CMRC did not attempt to enforce any of these schemes because early in its existence it had become clear that its compulsory powers were inadequate and no government was prepared to increase them, because of the unacceptable social cost of raising unemployment levels.

71. COAL 12/77, PRO, Lothians, September 9, 1933. The Marquis of Lothian's family had been associated with the Newbattle collieries since the time of the Reformation. The first managing director of the Lothian Coal Company, Archibald Hood, was succeeded in that post in 1902 by his son James Hood, who became chairman of the Company from 1911. The Dundas family interest in the Arniston Coal Co. Ltd. dated back to the seventeenth century. A.G. Moore and Company, founded by Ralph Moore in the nineteenth century, was run by his three sons (R.T., A.G. and D.M. Moore) in the inter-war period while in 1923 three generations of the Clarke family were among the owners and directors of the Ormiston Coal Company.

After protracted negotiations with the Committee and between themselves the Lothian owners eventually formed a voluntary co-operative scheme, involving eleven companies (producing 95 per cent of total output) operating twenty two collieries at which 11,000 workers were employed. A company was formed under the title 'The Associated Lothian Coal Owners Ltd.' in 1935 (the first of its kind in Scotland), with powers to centralise sales and 'for the conduct of any business or operations in the common interest of the constituent companies' but it was formed not under the Coal Mines Act of 1930 but under Section 12 of the Mining Industry Act 1921.⁽⁷²⁾ Because the agreement on which the new company was based allowed for the extension of its activities to areas other than marketing, the Coal Mines Reorganisation Committee agreed 'not to press for further financial mergers for the time being on condition that the voluntary scheme was in due course extended to co-operation on the productive side',⁽⁷³⁾ although the scheme was not subsequently altered in any way.

Events in the Lothians did not escape the notice of Sir Frank Beauchamp, who would have been involved in negotiations with the CMRC not only in Somerset and Bristol but also in the Forest of Dean, where he and his brother Louis had mining interests.

72. Seventh Annual Report by the Board of Trade, under Section 12, on the Working of Part One of the Act (1921), Cmd.4816 (1935)

73. Annual Reports on the working of Part 1 of the Coal Mines Act (1930), Cmd. 4468 (1933).

Beauchamp was evidently not opposed to state intervention when it suited his purposes and it seems that the idea of a forced unification of the Somerset collieries, in which SCL would be the predominate company, became increasingly attractive. Early in 1932 he asked Sir Ernest Gowers to suggest to the other Somerset owners that they should agree to an 'experiment' such as those being made in the Lothians and the Forest of Dean, where unification plans were then at the preparatory stage.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Gowers' privately thought it probable that any strict rationalisation of the coal industry as a whole would involve the complete closure of the Somerset coalfield⁽⁷⁵⁾ but, as the limited powers of the CMRC meant this was an unlikely prospect in the immediate future, he may well have left the district alone if it had not been for Sir Frank's personal intervention.⁽⁷⁶⁾

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74. COAL 12/62, PRO, Somerset, undated memorandum. Gowers noted that Sir Frank Beauchamp, the major coal owner in Somerset, had asked him to persuade the other owners to consider a unification plan. The file also contains a letter from Beauchamp (October 21, 1933) in which he declares that 'the means and the only means of preventing the Mining Industry from Committing Suicide' was control of export / inland output and of prices. Beauchamp was a strong advocate of price control and of the quota system but he wanted the quota divided between inland and export districts in such a way as to avoid exporting districts dumping some of their permitted output in inland and coastal districts. In 1934, Part 1 of the Coal Mines Act (1930) was amended on these principles.
75. COAL 12/62, PRO, Somerset, undated note on Gowers meeting with Egbert Spear, c.1931.
76. COAL 12/63, PRO, Somerset, Beauchamp's role in the initiative was apparently not revealed to the other owners. Gowers wrote to him on April 19, 1932, to tell him that meetings had been arranged with the other owners and to offer to meet Beauchamp at his office or 'anywhere else that you please' to let him know 'what the others say'. COAL 12/62, PRO, Somerset. In his notes of interviews with Somerset coal owners (April 25, 1932) Gowers commented on Louis Beauchamp's reluctance to meet him, which he believed was because 'he always follows Sir Frank's lead in everything and did not know in what direction Sir Frank was leading on this occasion'.

In the event, none of the owners except Sir Frank Beauchamp would agree to the valuation of their collieries and most of them opposed unification completely or, if they accepted it in principle, they wanted their own company excluded from the plan.⁽⁷⁷⁾ In the face of almost unanimous opposition, the committee officially decided to take no action in Somerset. Although the CMRC evidently believed that there was a strong prima facie case for applying Part 11 of the Coal Mines Act 1930 to the district, the weakness of the compulsory powers embodied in the Act meant that in practice the committee could hope for nothing more than some 'voluntary constructive effort' from the Somerset coal owners.⁽⁷⁸⁾

The family interests in some of the major Lothian companies, which the CMRC identified as one cause of opposition to amalgamation seem to have been outweighed by other factors that encouraged sufficiently co-operative attitudes to make the formation of the marketing company possible. Shared directorships may have contributed to mutual understanding⁽⁷⁹⁾ but the degree of competition between the companies in the region undoubtedly influenced coal owner's attitudes.

77. COAL 12/63, PRO, Somerset, The Writhlington group would not countenance any plan and Sir William Haldane, a director of Wm. Evans (Old Mills) Collieries Ltd. and also of Mells Colliery, expressed the view that unification would be a good thing for the district but he wanted no part of it for his own companies.

78. Annual Reports on the Working of Part 1 of the Coal Mines Act (1930), Cmd. 4468 (1933).

79. In the early 1920s well over half the directors in the 572 leading colliery concerns in the country held directorships in other coal companies. Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, pp 375-76; p375, f.n.3; p.376, f.n.1.

TABLE 1: IV

Some shared directorships in the Lothian Coal Industry
in the early 1920s

COMPANY	CHAIRMAN	MANAGING DIRECTOR	DIRECTORS	VISITING DIRECTOR
Arniston Coal Co Ltd	R N Dundas			Adam Nimmo
Edinburgh Colleries Ltd	Adam Nimmo	Adam Nimmo	R T Moore J A Clarke	
A G Moore & Co	R T Moore			
Niddrie & Behnar Coal Co Ltd	R T Moore			
Ormiston Coal Co	J A Clarke	J A Clarke		
Shotts Iron Co			Adam Nimmo	

SOURCE: Compiled from A S Cunningham, Mining in Mid & East Lothian, Chapter XVII, pp 111-125.

In Somerset, where competition for markets was particularly intense, the owners were at best suspicious of each other and often openly hostile. The directors of the Writhlington group, for example, made it quite clear that their opposition to any merger proposal was not based solely on financial considerations but also on the fact that 'they did not like the other coal owners in the district' and preferred to have nothing to do with them. (80)

80. COAL 12 /63. PRO, Somerset. Notes on interviews with Somerset owners, April 25, 1932.

Individualism, characteristic of the coal owners, was a feature more marked in Somerset than in the Lothians. In general ownership was impersonal in the Lothians, where the paternalistic role of the Lothian Coal Company was something of an exception in a coalfield where the scale of organisation almost invariably made the social relationships of production much less personal than they were in the small coal industry of Somerset. Even so, not all the coal owners of Somerset were familiar figures to their employees (notably in the companies run as partnerships, such as the Writhlington group and Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd.) and Sir Frank Beauchamp was remarkable for the degree of his involvement in the day to day running of his collieries.

In both coalfields it was the managers who had the most direct influence on the miners working lives. A.J. Parfitt (author of My Life As A Somerset Miner) was scathing about management efficiency in general but it seems that his critical attitude was rooted in resentment at what he believed was an increasing unwillingness, over time, of managers to 'learn from more experienced workmen'. Parfitt claimed that during his thirty years in the pits he had found that managers 'act as dictators, if men suggest something which they think is for the best, the reply is I pay you for working, I am paid for thinking'.⁽⁸¹⁾

81. A.J.Parfitt, My Life As A Somerset Miner (Radstock, 1930; reprinted 1972), p.28. Parfitt worked in the mines from the 1890s for some thirty years. He was an active trade unionist, having become an 'agitator,' as he put it, in 1911.

The frequency of consultations between management and the work force may well have declined as management became more professional⁽⁸²⁾ but, nonetheless, the Somerset miners' working knowledge of the complex local geology was still highly valued in the inter-war period. Closure was temporarily averted at Dunkerton colliery in 1921 when the lodge committee prepared a scheme for working it more efficiently, which was accepted by the owners and achieved an immediate increase in output.⁽⁸³⁾ Similarly at Writhlington and Kilmersdon it was customary for the manager to consult the branchers (who did the stone-driving) over development work or when a seam was "lost" through faulting and 'nine times out of ten their advice was taken'.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Managers were, on occasions, the focus of hostility in a way that would seem to support the general argument that the existence of an intermediary group could obscure the "true" nature of the relationship between capital and labour, fostering deference and class harmony. When the sacking of three men provoked a spontaneous walk-out at Radstock Collieries in 1920, the miners' agent was quick to condemn the 'unreasonable action of the management' as the cause of the conflict. He emphasised

82. Although in Somerset professionalisation of management was not extensive. See above, p.11.

83. Minutes, Somerset Miners Association (S.M.A.), B.U.L. June 15, 1921.

84. The quotation is taken from tape recorded interviews made for an oral history project undertaken by B.Ed. students at Bath College of Higher Education, c.1968. The tapes have not been transcribed and in terms of sound quality and content they are of little value. The speaker's comment is, however, supported by other personal testimony.

that the aristocratic owner (the 'kindly disposed gentleman', Lord Waldegrave)⁽⁸⁵⁾ was in no way to blame for his manager's part in the dispute. The agent's case against the manager reflected the strong sense of social hierarchy that was characteristic of Somerset miners, who expected managers to 'look out for the bosses interests' but did not generally resent this as long as the manager conformed to the consensus of the "proper" way to treat the workers. Indeed, many miners insist that personal relationships with managers and officials were good in spite of individual confrontations at times, or broader disputes over such issues as wages and conditions.

Moreover, there were regional features of management in Somerset that were conducive to harmonious relations in the workplace. Continuity and what might be described as "localness" were characteristic of the coalfield, where managers tended to stay in their jobs until retirement or death and where there were few "outsiders" among the managerial group. In the Writhlington collieries there were only three managers under private ownership after 1865 and the last incumbent (Charles Southern) held the post from 1914 to 1947.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The managerial and supervisory category as a whole was dominated by local men. Some were recruited from the families of existing managers. Alternatively, a son might follow his father into the pits but study at Mining Institute classes for the qualifications necessary for promotion to deputy, under manager and eventually (for a very few) to colliery manager. One of Beauchamp's managers, whose career

85. Somerset Guardian, February 13, 1920.

86. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.194.

followed this pattern, recalls that his ambition was vehemently opposed by his father, who saw it in terms of class betrayal and begged his son not to 'join the bosses'.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Social deference and a strong sense of hierarchical order coexisted in Somerset with widespread suspicion of any miner who started "bossing"⁽⁸⁸⁾ but locally-born managers had a wealth of shared experience in common with the bulk of the workforce and there is no evidence of sustained hostility against them.

Different attitudes prevailed in the Lothians, where the managerial and supervisory group was proportionally larger and correspondingly more impersonal than in Somerset.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The general manager of a Lothian company could be as distant from the work place as the coal owners were, while even the colliery manager was a somewhat remote figure to a miner working in a multi-pit mine, where each unit of production was controlled by an undermanager. Managers and coal owners are rarely named in the minute books of the Lothian union and they hardly feature at all in the reminiscences of miners, other than those from

87. C.H. Weeks, Midsomer Norton. Mr. Weeks won a scholarship to grammar school in the early 1920s but could not take up the place because of the expense involved. He started work at Braysdown pit aged fourteen and studied at mining classes from aged twenty, taking his under managers certificate in 1936 and a managers certificate in 1943. After nationalisation he managed Old Mills colliery and later Norton Hill colliery until 1956 when he was appointed deputy group manager for the coalfield, a post he retained until his retirement at the end of the decade.

88. Parfitt comments on this, op.cit., p.30. Another miner recalls that when he started on the pits in 1946, it took him months to overcome the hostility of his workmates, who 'despised' him because his father worked in the colliery office and was known as 'a bosses man'. Clarence Smith, Radstock.

89. This was not only because of the larger scale of the industry in the Lothians but also because mechanised mining required a larger supervisory group than did the traditional method of working in Somerset.

Newtowngrange. The only personality to emerge from the anonymous ranks of the Lothian managers is Mungo Mackay, the general manager of the Lothian Coal Company and colliery manager at the Lady Victoria mine from 1890 until the 1930s. Mackay, the personification of the Company's paternalistic rule over Newtowngrange and its collieries, is recalled as a stern disciplinarian but a nevertheless 'just' and 'fair' man: 'relationships with management were good, the manager came round once a week underground and if there was any genuine grievance Mackay would investigate it but God help you if you told him a lie...'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In conversation, Lothian miners other than those from Newtowngrange show a distinct tendency to think in terms of 'them and us' and coal owners, managers and supervisors are generally spoken of critically and indiscriminately as 'the bosses'. However, few miners commented on relations with management, except in response to direct questions. The topics spontaneously raised in discussions of the industry between the wars were the nature of mining work, wages, hours and conditions.⁽⁹¹⁾ Policies mattered more than personalities to miners in the Lothians.

90. Archibald Wilson, Newtowngrange. See 'Men of Note in the British Coal Industry. No.149, Mr. Mungo Mackay', Colliery Guardian (December 21, 1928), Vol.137, p.2474.

91. The limited number of interviews conducted for this study and other associated problems (see the preface, p.ix.) weaken the authority of assertions based on any interpretation of former miners' conversations but it seems likely that the Lothian men interviewed were not untypical in their attitudes. A national survey conducted in 1946 revealed that miners in general considered the interest of the job, hours, wages and conditions to be of more importance than relations with management. Social Survey, Recruitment of Boys to the Mining Industry, RG 23/85, PRO, p.p.11-12.

Moreover, although family interests of one sort or another persisted in several Lothian companies, the emergence of a more corporate style of capitalism had brought about fundamental changes in the industry which tended to increase the generally impersonal nature of work. Who owned the pits was, of course a major issue to those who favoured nationalisation of the mining industry and there were miners in both coalfields who advocated this. The Somerset miner A.J. Parfitt was one of them but, nonetheless, he looked back nostalgically to the nineteenth century coal owners, 'who would pay the railway fare of their employees to a seaside resort, and at Christmas give them a good joint of meat.....since it has become limited companies the employees have to carry more upon their backs, and even one days holiday out of the three hundred and sixty five is out of the question.' (92)

However, the rise of middle-class entrepreneurs in the late nineteenth century did not sweep away the aristocratic interest in Somerset mining overnight⁽⁹³⁾ and furthermore the 'new' type of coal owner (epitomised by W.B.Beachim) did not instigate immediate or dramatic changes in the industry. William Beachim's collieries were challenging Lord Waldegrave's Radstock Collieries for supremacy in the late nineteenth century but Beachim (like the Waldegraves), practised benevolent paternalism in the community even though he maintained an aggressive style of management in his pits. Although Beachim was implacably hostile to trade unionism, he had vertical ties of interest with his

92. Parfitt, op. cit., p. 33.

93. See above, p.26.

employees for he was non-conformist in religion and Liberal in his politics at a time when Methodism and adherence to the Liberal party were characteristic of the Somerset miners.⁽⁹⁴⁾ As the Beauchamps rose in social status they acquired many of the notable houses and small estates in the area⁽⁹⁵⁾ and they also to some extent replaced the old aristocrats as a focus for social deference but by the early twentieth century economic circumstances were revealing the financial limits of paternal benevolence. The community gossiped, speculated and passed judgement on the private affairs of the Beauchamps and turned out in numbers (especially the women) to witness such spectacles as the marriage of a Beauchamp daughter⁽⁹⁶⁾ but there were no semi-feudal feasts for SCL employees to mark such events nor were there annual company outings or Christmas gifts for the miners. What is more, the process of class formation in British society had destroyed or weakened the significance of many vertical ties of interest.

94. P.M. Bonsall, 'Masters and Men: a study of trade unionism, class and politics in the Somerset Coalfield, 1890-1914', undergraduate dissertation CNA, Bath CHE, 1984, passim.

95. Sir Frank Beauchamp lived at Woodborough House, Peasedown St. John, where he worked a large home farm and raised pedigree cattle. Louis Beauchamp farmed the estate attached to Norton Hall, where he frequently entertained the local hunt to pre-meet breakfasts; his property in other areas included a small estate in Scotland and a racing stud in Southern England. Ralph B. Beauchamp (part owner of Mells Quarries and chairman of Chamborough Colliery Co. in the late 1930's) also farmed extensively on land at his various properties in the county, Newbury House, Stratton House and Lipyeate House. Ralph Beauchamp was chairman of both the Old Passage Severn Ferry Company, Gloucestershire, and Amalgamated Patents Ltd., Cardiff. Who's Who in Somerset (Hereford, 1934) p.18.

96. Gwen Malcolm, Memoirs (privately printed, no date, c. 1970) Gwen Malcolm was one of Louis Beauchamp's daughters. A copy of her Memoirs is held at the Public Library in Midsomer Norton, Avon.

In Somerset the second generation of Beauchamps were Conservative Unionists and attended the Anglican church while the miners had moved virtually en masse to support for the Labour party by the early 1920s and the influence of religion had declined somewhat on the coalfield. Social harmony was increasingly strained under the difficult economic conditions of the inter-war period and many miners recall Sir Frank Beauchamp with particular bitterness. Thus, a man who worked at Norton Hill colliery for thirty-five years, told a local author in 1988 that he believed the decline of the coalfield could be attributed partly to changes of ownership around the turn of the century and he went on to criticise the Beauchamps:

Although (Mr. Church) does not agree with what was called the Lord of the Manor system, these Lords were better than the new men who took over; "The Waldegrave's built houses for their miners, they looked after their miners. The Beauchamps... never built anything. They took over the old collieries, salvaged what was any good, then closed the rest.. They were terrible".⁽⁹⁷⁾

It is worth noting that Mr. Church spent much of his working life at Norton Hill under the National Coal Board but (speaking nearly fifty years after nationalisation and some fourteen years after the last pit closed in Somerset) that he recalled the pre-nationalisation era most vividly and, furthermore, compared it to what preceded it rather than with what followed. A.J. Parfitt and many other Somerset miners were similarly backward-looking in their attitudes.

97. P.Collier, Collier's Way (Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, 1987), p.59. Collier's Way is a ramblers' guide to walks in the Somerset coalfield but it contains some reminiscences of former miners in a short section entitled 'Miners in Conversation'.

The persistence into the inter-war period of many continuities with the nineteenth century did much to foster conservatism in the coalfield. Indeed, one of the starkest points of contrast between the industry in the Lothians and that in Somerset is the different experience of the two coalfields during the thirty years or so prior to the first World War. Rapid development in the Lothians from 1890 to 1914, accompanied by technological change in the pits and social changes in the mining communities, was a watershed in the history of mining in Mid and East Lothian. There was no similarly abrupt disjuncture in the history of mining in Somerset.

Between the wars it was the regional factors discussed above that were primary determinants of how the Lothian and Somerset companies fared in a depressed and an increasingly competitive market. The relative success of the Lothian coal owners can be accounted for by the advantages that coalfield had in terms of physical conditions, product, geographical location and the fact that many of the Lothian collieries were virtually new sinkings or had recently been modernised and mechanised. Handicapped as they were by multiple disadvantages, the Somerset owners may well have regarded mere survival as a modest triumph but in a local context Sir Frank Beauchamp's policies were an absolute success for he achieved many of his aims and consolidated the position of Somerset Collieries Ltd.

The coal owners in both areas were individualistic (but none more so than Beauchamp) and family interests were still commonplace in both coalfields. The key differentials, however, were the scale of organisation and in Somerset the growing concentration of ownership. Differences in scale created greater physical and

social distance between the Lothian miner and the coal owner or manager than that which existed in Somerset, where relationships were far more personal. The paternalistic style of management in the Lothian Coal Company was unusual in the region but the relatively impersonal relations prevailing in most of the Lothian collieries seem likely to have been a neutral influence on attitudes to pit work. Relations with management were generally considered to be of far less importance than the interest of the job, the wage rates, hours and conditions. Personalities were of more significance in the small collieries of Somerset where attitudes to pit work were shaped in part by the coal owners' policies, especially those of Sir Frank Beauchamp.

In a coalfield where customary practise had almost the status of Holy Writ many traditions were being eroded by economic realities, including the policy of keeping elderly or partially disabled miners on the payroll as on-cost surface workers. Increasingly, men who were infirm or physically incapacitated were sacked. The 1920 strike at Radstock Collieries was highly unusual in Somerset because it originated in a spontaneous walk out, in protest against the sacking of three elderly men 'who had faithfully served the owners since their childhood days'.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Such dismissals were a challenge to the consensus of beliefs about the rights and duties of employees and employers. Similarly, Sir Frank Beauchamp is remembered with such hostility because he bought up collieries to increase the reserves of SCL but did not work them. He thus failed in what was widely perceived as the primary duty of a coal owner, to provide work for the miners.

98. Somerset Guardian, March 5, 1920. See above p.p.50-51.

Between the wars no miner in any coalfield could be confident of security of employment but the oral testimony suggests that the growing realisation that coalowners were now unable or unwilling to 'look after their miners', together with the number of pit closures in Somerset, encouraged some miners to leave the industry and made parents more likely to discourage their sons from going into the pits.

CHAPTER TWO

LABOUR IN THE PITS

The persistent stereotype of the miner as archetypal proletarian was based on an analysis of the characteristics of pit work, which put the miners firmly in the category of occupational groups which were perceived as conceptualising class structure in terms of power or conflict.⁽¹⁾ It was argued that their strong attachment to primary work groups and a high degree of job involvement and relative autonomy (in an industry in which supervision and control could not easily be enforced) fostered solidarities through shared work experience which were carried over into free time where they extended to a wider class consciousness, expressed in political radicalism.⁽²⁾ This stereotype has, however, been modified of late and few historians would accept the notion of the miners as a monolithic group, for it is widely recognised that the regional diversity of the industry makes generalisations about "the miners" misleading, if not meaningless.⁽³⁾

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1. M. Bulmer, Working Class Images of Society (1975); C. Bell and H. Newby, Community Studies (1971).
 2. *ibid.*; N. Dennis, F. Heneriques and C. Slaughter, Coal is Our Life (1956).
 3. R. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics 1900-1914 (Oxford, 1968); Most historians would agree with A.J. Taylor that 'the history of coal mining was to be approached as much at the regional as at the national level', quoted in J. Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century (Dublin, 1980), p.9. See also R. Harrison, (ed.), Independent Collier. The Collier as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered (Hassocks, Sussex, 1978).

Moreover, the centrality of work has been displaced in much of the recent historiography by a greater emphasis on power relationships in the community as the shaping force of consciousness and political behaviour.⁽⁴⁾ Yet the labour process still has a place in labour history⁽⁵⁾ and particularly so in a study that attempts to identify and address the various influences on attitudes to mining as an occupation. Work in the mines and its changing nature between 1919 and 1939 is therefore the theme of this chapter. Regional differences in scale, method, organisation and conditions are considered before moving on to some discussion of unemployment and of regularity of employment in the mines. In conclusion, changes in the work place are identified, pit discipline is commented upon and the likely effects on attitudes to mining of the experiences of labour in the pits are explored.

Regional differences in the scale of the industry were a major influence on the social relations of production. Categorising the coal mines by size according to numbers employed (Table II:1) reveals that 65.2 per cent of Somerset miners worked in collieries where wage earners numbered fewer than 500, whereas in the Lothians 65.6 per cent were employed at collieries where 500 or more men worked.

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4. M. Jones 'Approaches to the History of the Miners', review essay, Bulletin SSLH., 43 (Autumn, 1981), p.p. 71-74.
 5. P. Linebaugh, 'Labour History without the Labour Process: a note on John Gast and his times', Social History, Vol. 7 (1982) p.p.319-27.

TABLE II:1

Coal Mines by Size According to Numbers EmployedSomerset and the Lothians

Wage Earners Employed	Number of Mines		Number of Wage Earners		% of Total	
	Som.	Lothians	Somerset	Lothians	S	L
under 20	2	1	19	12	0.3	0.1
20-49	-	-	-	-	-	-
50-99	-	3	-	219	-	1.2
100-249	5	12	932	2147	12.6	12.7
250-449	10	9	3885	3428	52.6	20.2
500-749	4	5	2551	3200	34.5	19.0
750-999	-	3	-	2709	-	16.0
1000 & over	-	4	-	5191	-	30.8
Total	21	37*	7387	16906	100	100

SOURCE: Compiled from Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset) and A.S.Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians.

* Oxenford and Oxenford Mine (Ormeston Coal Co.) are counted as one for the purposes of this table; The collieries employed respectively 124 and 55 persons underground but shared 30 surface workers.

Note: Figures for Somerset are numbers employed in December 1920. The Lothian figures are for the year 1923.

A substantial proportion (30.8 per cent) of Lothian miners were employed at four collieries whose workforce was 1,000 or more. In the small pits of Somerset work-based relationships tended to be personal, with men and officials knowing each other well and often having intimate knowledge of the family circumstances of each other. The contrast with the Lothians is clearly illustrated in an anecdote from a Wallyford miner, William Couch. Mr. Couch insisted that he never knew the name of the manager in any pit he worked at. What is more, he recalled an occasion in the 1920s when he came off night shift and found his father suffering from such a hangover that he could not face going to work. The older

man was reluctant to lose a shift's pay and it was agreed that the son should take his place. William Couch therefore went to the colliery where his father was employed and worked a shift undetected by officials as a 'stranger'.(6)

It was however, the method of mining and system of organisation (rather than the scale of the industry) that determined the size of the primary work group. The method of working in Somerset was universally longwall-advancing and the bulk of output was hand got and manually hauled from the face throughout the inter-war period. Faces were from forty to an exceptional 300 yards long, depending mainly on the distance between faults. Level drift roads were driven into each district off the main roadway, at intervals of about sixty yards, and from them 'topples' or stall roads were set off at every twenty to thirty-five yards. The coal was worked to the rise whenever possible (so that the gradient in the topples favoured the load) and it was usually cut nearly at right angles to the strike to keep the working face approximately level although, in practice, it generally undulated slightly and rose or fell quite sharply where it met a fault. Where a working place dipped steeply from the topple head it was called a 'dipple' or deep side. The coal was undercut by hand and usually fell as a result of 'weighting' from the roof, although in some hard seams shots were fired to bring the coal down. The breakers (coal hewers) worked in pairs, in places assigned to them by management but once a man had a place there was strong resistance to managers' attempts to move them elsewhere and a miner who took over another man's place was likely to be ostracised by his

6. William Couch, Wallyford, Midlothian, July 1986. Born in the Fife coalfield in a mining family (1902), moved as a child to the Lothians.

workmates. Each working place was some twenty to thirty-five yards of face (depending on the distance between topples) and it was worked by two carting boys with the breakers, forming a primary work group known as a 'company'. The boys loaded coal into a putt and dragged it by means of the guss and crook⁽⁷⁾ to the trams, which might be either at the topple head or on the drift road at the foot of the topple. The term 'company' seems to have lingered on in Somerset from a time when the miners were independent contractors rather than wage-labourers.⁽⁸⁾ There are, however, scattered references in wages and accounts books to lump sums being paid to a named 'miner and company', which suggests that the earlier meaning of the term still had some validity.⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, it was not unknown for hewers and carters to apply for work as a 'company' between the wars, on the understanding that they would work together although paid separate day-rates or piece-rates.

The small primary work groups in Somerset were often family-based and it was a common experience for boys to start at the face 'carting after Father' or an older brother. Most boys were

7. The guss and crook was a harness-type device worn by the carting boys. See below p.104 for a full description.

8. The term was used in Lanarkshire in the 1830s and has been interpreted as meaning that hewers were not merely wage labourers but contractors paid either by piece rates or bargain-derived day wages and employed on a variety of tasks. A.Campbell, The Lanarkshire Miners, A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775 - 1874 (Edinburgh, 1979), p.34.

9. Wages and Accounts Books, Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd., NCB/BP/ SRO., Box .5, 52-60, passim.

disciplined into work by their fathers ('you'd get a fist in the ribs if you didn't go quick enough') and learned their 'pit-craft' from them, for Somerset breakers performed all the tasks of getting coal by hand including timbering their places. However, job specialisation was not complete in Somerset. Men were frequently moved (though they often opposed this) to different jobs but sometimes they chose to work in a different category: it was not unusual for a breaker to work as a brancher (stone-driver) at times and vice-versa. During his thirty years in the pits A.J.Parfitt followed the normal progression from trapper to carting boy to breaker but he also spent short periods as an examiner and often performed tasks that were not strictly those of a breaker, such as working an incline haulage and cutting timber on the surface.⁽¹⁰⁾ The relative lack of specialisation made status a potentially less-divisive matter in Somerset than it was in some coalfields, because the breakers did not form as distinctive and dominant an elite as the face-workers did in many other areas.

In the mechanised mines of the Lothians the total coal-getting cycle was completed once every twenty-four hours by working three shifts, each of which carried out only one component part of the process. Thus on the first shift the coal was undercut by 'machine men' (repairs to roads and some preparations were also done on this night shift); on the next shift the coal was brought down by the 'rippers' or 'getters' and on the third shift it was cleared and loaded by the 'fillers'. It has been estimated that

10. Parfitt, Life as a Somerset Miner, passim.

on an average face, employing forty men, the shift-spread would be in the order of ten per cutting and ripping shift with twenty men on the filling shift.⁽¹¹⁾ The primary work group in the Lothians was a shift with its shot-firers and its deputies and other officials but it is important to remember that diversity was an intra-regional characteristic of the industry, as well as a regional one. Therefore, some Somerset miners (particularly those working in the Pensford and Bromley pits) did experience the process of mechanisation, even though traditional methods prevailed in general. Similarly, not all Lothian miners worked in highly-mechanised pits or seams. The 'five foot' seam in the Prestongrange undersea coal was worked 'on the ordinary longwall method without conveyors' in 1938, from four or five to about thirty men on each face. The following year the 'Great Seam' was being worked by the board and pillar method, with three places of 12' rooms at work employing in total 'eleven miners, four hole-borers, four machine men.'⁽¹²⁾ There was one 750' conveyor face in the Prestongrange undersea coal but the face length on average was about 150' (depending usually on the number of men available), divided into six working places of 25' each. Belt or pan conveyors were commonplace but where the haulage was not fully mechanised⁽¹³⁾ roofs were ripped to a sufficient height to allow trams to be pushed right into the coal face, thus avoiding the double handling which was an inherent feature of the primitive haulage system in Somerset.

11. E.L. Trist and K.W. Bamforth, 'Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal Getting.', Human Relations, 4, 1, (1951) p.p.3-38

12. Misc. papers, Summerlee Iron Co Ltd., CB28/17/3, WRH, Edinburgh

13. There were 466 horses at work in the Lothian pits in 1913, falling to 310 by 1923. A.S. Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, p.59. Statistical tables in the Annual Reports of the Inspector of Mines give some information by county, including the number of horses at work in the pits of the Lothians and Somerset, 1920-39

The length of ground a man had to strip and clear (his 'stent') varied from the average 25' according to roof height: the higher the roof, the longer the stent. (14)

The tradition of occupational inheritance continued (although declining) in the Lothians, as it did to a much-lesser extent in Somerset. It seems to have been almost taken for granted (especially before 1926) that boys born in the company town of Newtongrange would eventually join the pay-roll of the Lothian Coal Company. Many sons of colliers in Prestonpans grew up not only seeing themselves as future miners but as 'Grange men' or 'Links men', according to which mine their fathers worked at. (15) However, going into the industry in the Lothians rarely meant working closely with father, brother or other relatives. A father might 'speak for' his son as a boy approached school-leaving age but many lads simply applied for work to colliery officials. Most were initially employed directly by management as surface on cost labour but when a boy reached the age to work underground he was likely to be recruited by a contractor's agent, for subcontracting (16) was standard practice in the Lothian coalfield.

This was 'a corrupt system' in the opinion of some miners, enabling the contractor and management to cheat the owners as well as exploit the workers. Separate contracts for each face and

14. Much of the information on working methods was given by men who had worked chiefly at Prestongrange and Prestonlinks, interviewed at Musselburgh Miners Welfare, July 1986.

15. The Pans Remembered, a collection of memoirs of Prestonpans based on a community oral-history project, published by East Lothian District Library (1986), p.p. 27-33

16. For a case study of the system in the Kent coalfield between the wars, see R. Goffee, 'Incorporation and Conflict: a Case Study of Subcontracting in the Coal Industry', Sociological Review, 29, 3 (1981), p.p 475-97.

every operation were usual and it is alleged that managers and undermanagers often connived at an excessively high price for the contractor, from which they took a cut. The distribution of wages was in the control of the contractor and 'favourites' would be paid more than the rest of the group. With boys' wages at almost half the adult rate some contractors employed only one or two adults but took on boys to make up the numbers, 'driving' them to produce as much work as a man. Major contractors (such as the garage-owner in Newtongrange) did not even work underground but those that did could, according to some Lothian miners, take home as much money as was paid to all the sub-contract men. The contractors are remembered with particular bitterness (far more than the private coal owners) and their methods are widely condemned, as is their general attitude to labour: miners claim they were 'bought and sold' under the system, regarded not in human terms as individual men and boys but as mere 'bodies', valued 'at so much a light'.

Miners in both coalfields were, of course, directly affected by natural phenomena and were subject to the usual risks of mining, from frequent minor injuries to roof-falls, fires or explosions. The lack of certainty and the physical dangers of their working lives have been said to account for the alleged fatalism of many miners, for their superstition and legendary love of gambling.

This geological map illustrates the subsurface structure of the Brays Down area. The map is oriented with North at the top. Key features include:

- Coal Veins:** Several veins are shown, including the 'GREAT VEIN' (top left), 'TOP LITTLE VEIN', 'MIDDLE VEIN', 'STAYING VEIN', 'BOTTOM LITTLE VEIN', 'BELL VEIN', and 'NINE INCH VEIN'.
- Faults:** Numerous faults are indicated by lines with arrows showing the direction of movement. Labels include 'FAULT ON WEST SIDE', 'FAULT ON EAST SIDE', 'FAULT ON SOUTH SIDE', and 'FAULT ON NORTH SIDE'.
- Infrastructure:** The map shows the 'BRAYS-DOWN PIT' (top right), 'TYNINGS PIT' (middle right), 'MIDDLE PIT' (bottom right), and 'NORTON HILL PIT' (bottom right). It also depicts the 'SOMERSET COAL CANAL CO'S RAILWAY' and 'WELLS WAY PIT'.
- Topography:** The 'BRAYS-DOWN PIT' is shown as a large, irregularly shaped area. The 'WELLS WAY PIT' is a smaller, more regular area.
- Other Features:** The map includes labels for 'BRAYS-DOWN PIT', 'TYNINGS PIT', 'MIDDLE PIT', 'NORTON HILL PIT', 'SOMERSET COAL CANAL CO'S RAILWAY', 'WELLS WAY PIT', 'BRAYS-DOWN PIT', 'TYNINGS PIT', 'MIDDLE PIT', 'NORTON HILL PIT', 'SOMERSET COAL CANAL CO'S RAILWAY', and 'WELLS WAY PIT'.

Source: misc. papers, Waldegrave MSS.(SRO), no date, c. 1860.

It has also been suggested that job-satisfaction was particularly high in hand-got mining but that the frequent interruptions of the process created psychological frustrations which found expression in aggressive attitudes to authority.⁽¹⁷⁾ For the Somerset miner, working by traditional methods, every action performed at the face had a clear purpose and there was a visible end product in the form of output related to effort but the uncertainties of mining meant that a shift could rarely be worked to a pre-conceived plan:

Mining is an industry which is incomparable with other industries. There is no regularity about it. The place that is normal one week is abnormal next week. The former you may produce 50 tons, the latter 20 tons. Faults and other interruptions, cause the place to be abnormal and the best skilled miner is at a disadvantage to produce his usual output.⁽¹⁸⁾

Throughout the Somerset coalfield the seams were subject to contortion and folding, causing faults that ranged in throw from a few inches to hundreds of feet. In the Nettlebridge area (in the southern part of the district) the strata were over-folded, so that the sequence found elsewhere was completely inverted. Both the upper or Radstock series and the lower Farrington series bore eight workable seams, ranging in thickness from 9" to about 2'6" in the Radstock series and from 4" to 1'6" in the Farrington series.⁽¹⁹⁾

17. M. Benney, 'The Legacy of Mining' in M. Bulmer (ed.) Mining and Social Change. Durham County in the Twentieth Century (1978), p.p. 49-59.

18. Parfitt, Life as a Somerset Miner, p. 18.

19. For references to sources on the geology see p.17, f.n.18. Information on working methods is taken from a variety of sources including oral evidence, Parfitt, op.cit., passim, Down and Warrington, op.cit., passim and the Report of the Guss Committee, Cmd 3200 (1929)

The thickness and character of the seams varied so much that those which were too thin or poor to be worked in one colliery might be profitably mined in another; even over the distance of a working face the section was likely to change considerably, which added to the difficulties of winning coal in places where the roof-height might be no more than twenty inches. Many of the pits were wet and most of the miners worked at times in places where benching and hewing the coal could only be done while lying in pools of water. In the dry pits and in notoriously dusty seams there was a danger of explosion from the coal dust but little was done (by way of watering or spreading stone-dust) to allay the problem. The pits were not in general gassy, so naked lights were in common use but some seams in the Radstock mines were noted for their 'blowers' - substances in the coal which exploded when struck with a pick, often causing burns or other injuries to a breakers' face and eyes.⁽²⁰⁾ Ventilation by means of a furnace at the bottom of the shaft was commonplace until well into the twentieth century but it was often so inadequate that the air in places was sufficiently foul to extinguish a naked candle and the heat could be intense.⁽²¹⁾ In these conditions breakers and carters worked at the face and ran the roads bare-foot and in the minimum of clothing.

None of the workings in Somerset were more than 2000 feet deep and it seems likely that miners came and went from the pits if not at will then at least with greater freedom than their counterparts in the deeper Lothian mines. Not only did breakers leave their places to fetch timber from the surface but

20. Wage rates were always marginally higher at the pits where these seams were worked, in recognition of the risk of injury.

21. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.44

footballers finished their shift early and ascended an hour before their workmates on Saturdays.(22) What is more, in evidence at an inquest on a carting boy in 1924, it was stated that after the boy complained to his breaker of a headache and nausea, he 'came home early' - as casually as if he had been a factory-worker or office boy.(23)

However the difficult physical conditions in Somerset do not seem to have provoked aggressive attitudes to authority (as suggested above) but rather to have enhanced the miners' self-respect and job satisfaction, for they took a great pride in their ability to mine thin seams. Few of them would have shared H.S.Jevon's opinion, that mining in the relatively shallow pits in the county meant that the breakers required 'less skill and intelligence' than hewers in other coalfields needed.(24) Indeed, most would probably have agreed with the somewhat different assessment made by Frank Hodges (secretary of the MFGB) during the Sankey inquiry of 1919, who remarked to Frank Beauchamp that 'the work of the miners in these thin seams in your district is as hard - I will not put it harder, but I believe it is harder - as the work of any other miners in any other district.'(25)

Work in the Lothian mines was a relatively comfortable matter in comparison to conditions in Somerset, even though the seams were not exceptionally thick. Lothian men regarded 2' 3" as the ideal height because it could be worked in a kneeling position but they

22. See below, p.172.

23. Compensation Files (SMA archive, BUL), letters, press cuttings and misc. papers referring to the case of Douglas Kingman, aged fifteen. The boy died of blood poisoning in May, 1924. Below, p.160.

24. H.S. Jevons, British Coal Trade, p. 80.

25. R.C. on the Coal Industry, Cmd 360 (1919), pp.890-97.

generally describe any seam less than 2' as 'thin'. The Lothian owners left unworked particularly thin or dirty seams⁽²⁶⁾ but the practice of ripping roofs to allow trams to be pushed 'in-bye' to the face made working places less cramped. Moreover, the main roads were usually level, many were lit by electricity and miners commonly travelled from pit bottom to the face in trams. In Somerset few men had to travel more than one and a half to two miles underground⁽²⁷⁾ but the way was often torturous and difficult. When, in 1931, the Bath Cyclists' Touring Club visited Pensford Colliery ('the most up to date mine in Somerset') they found it possible to walk upright for the first few yards down the road from the pit bottom

but soon the tallest had to stoop, then all... in places the roof was only four foot high. Ducking and dodging pit-props and overhead pulleys and sliding down many watery slopes, we arrived hot and sweaty at the coal face, 1000 feet below the Pensford Inn.⁽²⁸⁾

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26. Where bands of clay occurred in the strata these were often worked as well as the coal seams. Annual reports, Crown Undersea Mines, Prestongrange, Summerlee Iron Co. Ltd., CB 28/17/3, WRH, Edinburgh.
27. 52.6 per cent of employees travelled half to one mile underground and only 10.3 per cent travelled one and a half to two miles. 18.5 per cent worked less than half a mile from the pit bottom and another 18.6 per cent at a distance of one to one and a half miles. Man-riding facilities were provided for 12.6 per cent of the total 1,382 face workers at the week ending November 25, 1944, but it seems likely that this was a war-time innovation. Regional Survey (British and Somerset), Table XVIII, p.41.
28. Somerset Guardian, March 21, 1931.

It took the party an hour each way to traverse one and a half miles but the miners were allowed 'only twenty minutes for the same journey to their work.'

There was no payment for 'travelling time' to the face but hours per shift worked underground were statutorily regulated and varied from seven and a half to eight hours in the period.⁽²⁹⁾ In both coalfields owners attempted to enforce overtime or to apply the principle of the 'spreadover', whereby the legal maximum number of hours was calculated not by the day but over a working week or fortnight. Beauchamp told the Sankey Commission in 1919 that coal cutters had in some cases proved more expensive than hand labour and, furthermore, he claimed that

there is only one thing that... would help us in regard to these coal-cutting machines and that is to have a regulation whereby the machine men's hours would be limited by the week and not by the day. Where you have a short space between two faults and you put three men with a machine, if everything goes well they cut through the face in five or six hours; and they have nothing more to do.⁽³⁰⁾

Geoffrey Peto, Conservative MP for the Frome (Somerset) constituency, spoke in support of the spreadover in the Commons in 1926, where he too claimed that fixing maximum hours by the day was 'far too rigid' and a great obstacle to the coal industry:

'If anything goes wrong with the machinery, it is impossible to work an extra half-hour or extra hour to complete that shifts' work, and the result is a considerable loss in the efficiency of that particular mine.'⁽³¹⁾

29. Detailed information on hours is readily available in the historiography of the industry in the period, e.g. B.J. McCormick, Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry (1979), p.p.191 and 248; Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, numerous entries in the index under 'hours' but see also 'Eight Hours Act' entries.

30. R.C. on the Coal Industry, CMD 360 (1919)

31. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Vol. 191 (278) February 3, 1926.

The spreadover was supported by most owners who had mechanised their collieries or were in the process of doing so, including those in the Lothians and the owners of Pensford and Bromley in Somerset.

Both the SMA and MELMA opposed any lengthening of the working day, either by application of the spreadover system or by overtime being imposed under threat of suspension or dismissal. The Lothian branches frequently condemned overtime and endorsed the unions' eleven-day fortnight policy but (as in the rest of Scotland) extensive overtime was common-place and not always paid for. MELMA officials claimed that there was little they could do about it as so many men were obviously willing to work seven days a week and every hour they could get but in the early 1930s (as a result of pressure from the MFGB) an inquiry was made into conditions in Scotland, with special reference to Lanarkshire. The Report of the inquiry revealed strong grounds for criticism of excessive overtime and noted that the legal requirements for recording hours worked were 'not sufficiently observed.' It also recommended that overtime should be reduced but it continued to be widespread in Scotland.⁽³²⁾

Short-time working rather than excessive overtime was more characteristic of the Somerset coal industry between the wars. However, by 1928 there were two coal cutters at work in the district, in the Pensford and Bromley pits. The installation of

32. Report of a Special Enquiry into the Working of Overtime in Coal Mines in Scotland, CMD 4949, X, 799 (1934-35), 1935. A previous enquiry had been held in Lancashire, the findings of which were that the incidence of overtime was not such as to affect unemployment and that the average amount worked could be regarded as necessary for efficiency. CMD 4626 (1933-34).

the first coal cutter (at Pensford) was soon followed by reports to the SMA of infringements of the 8-Hour Act, although the lodge representative explained that 'there was an implication' that the machine-men were not sure if they were violating the Act by co-operating with management over working longer hours because of 'the new method.'⁽³³⁾ The agent made it clear that they were and thereafter there was some resistance to management policy but men who refused to co-operate were penalised by being suspended for a shift.⁽³⁴⁾ By December 1929, overtime was being worked 'to an alarming extent' at both Pensford and Bromley.⁽³⁵⁾ The union had intermittent negotiations with the managers from 1927 onwards and the agent also conducted a lengthy correspondence with the divisional inspector of mines over the issue. At the inspector's suggestion, a joint committee was formed in 1930 to consider ways and means of dispensing with overtime⁽³⁶⁾ but the SMA withdrew after three fruitless meetings had failed to improve the situation.⁽³⁷⁾

As to the miner's pay, it is notoriously difficult to draw comparisons between district wage rates because of the complexities of the wage structure in the coal industry.⁽³⁸⁾ Moreover, the fact that the Scottish coalfields were treated as one district is an added complication.

33. Minute Books, SMA, BUL, June 24, 1927.

34. *ibid*; February 22, 1930.

35. *ibid*; December 20, 1929.

36. *ibid*; September 26, 1930.

37. *ibid*; October 31, 1930.

38. The standard text remains Rowe, Wages in the Coal Industry.

For information on national averages between the wars see Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, Chapter 10, 11, p.p.442-456

TABLE II : II
SUMMARY OF WAGE RATES PER SHIFT,
SELECTED DISTRICTS, DECEMBER 1921. (UNDERGROUND WORKERS.)

DISTRICT	YEAR OF BASIS	% payable ON BASIS	BASIS s. d.	PRESENT WAGE s. d.	CHANGE s. d.
COAL GETTERS ON DAY WAGE					
BRISTOL	1918	25.99	5 9.5	7 1.8	-0 6.89
CUMBERLAND	1915	min*	6 4.5	8 3.45	
FOREST OF DEAN	1919	21.73	6 2.5	7 6.39	+0 1.3
SCOTLAND	1888	136.44	4 0	9 5.5	-0 2.5
SOMERSET	1918	57.58	5 8.5	8 11.89	-0 6.61
SOUTH WALES	1915	28.30	6 10.5	8 9.62	-0 0.25
SOUTH YORKS	1911	109.54	7 3	15 2.29	-0 1
LANCASHIRE	1911	73.00	7 6	12 11.5	-0 2
PUTTERS, FILLERS, HAULIERS & TRAMMEN					
BRISTOL	1918	25.99	4 10.9	6 2.26	-0 5
CUMBERLAND	1915	min*			
FOREST OF DEAN	1919	21.73	4 10.25	5 11.2	+0 1
SCOTLAND	1888	136.44	4 0	9 5.5	-0 2.5
SOMERSET	1918	57.58	5 3	8 3.25	-0 6
SOUTH WALES	1915	28.30	5 10.5	7 6.25	-0 0.25
SOUTH YORKS	1911	109.54	6 3	13 1	-0 0.5
LANCASHIRE	1911	73.00	5 6	9 6.25	-0 1.5
TIMBERMEN, STONEMEN, BUSHERS OR RIPPERS					
BRISTOL	1918	25.99	5 6.7	7 0.1	-5 6.4
CUMBERLAND	1915	min*	6 4.5	8 3.45	no change
FOREST OF DEAN	1919	21.73	5 10.2	7 1.5	+0 1.26
SCOTLAND	1888	136.44	3 9	8 10.39	-0 2.5
SOMERSET	1918	57.58	6 0	9 5.5	-0 6.5
SOUTH WALES	1915	28.30	6 10.5	8 9.62	-0 0.25
SOUTH YORKS	1911	109.54	6 6	13 7.44	-0 0.5
LANCASHIRE	1911	73.00	5 3	9 1	-0 1.5
LABOURERS					
BRISTOL	1918	25.99	5 0.3	6 3.97	-0 5.1
CUMBERLAND	1915	min*	6 0	7 9.6	no change
FOREST OF DEAN	1919	21.73	4 10.5	5 11.2	-0 0.1
SCOTLAND	1888	136.44	3 3	7 8.21	-0 2.5
SOMERSET	1918	57.58	4 11.25	7 9.32	-0 5.5
SOUTH WALES	1915	28.30	5 0	6 4.81	no change
SOUTH YORKS	1911	109.54	5 6	11 6.2	-0 0.5
LANCASHIRE	1911	73.00	5 3	9 1	-0 1.5
BOYS 16 YEARS					
BRISTOL	1918	25.99	2 8	3 4.3	0 5.1
CUMBERLAND	1915	min*	3 3	4 2.7	no change
FOREST OF DEAN	1919	21.73			
SCOTLAND	1888	136.44	2 0	4 8.74	-0 0.75
SOMERSET	1918	57.58	2 7.5	4 1.57	-0 3
SOUTH WALES	1915	28.30	3 0	3 10	no change
SOUTH YORKS	1911	109.54	3 0	6 3.5	-0 0.25
LANCASHIRE	1911	73.00	2 6	4 4	-0 0.5

Minimum = 30% on basis

SOURCE: Proceedings of MFGB (1921)

However, Table II:II gives some indication of the regional variations in wage rates in 1921 and as a broad generalisation it would be true to say that Scotland was traditionally a comparatively high-wage district, while wages in Somerset were persistently low. The difference can perhaps be explained by historical regional factors. Competition for labour was certainly more intense in the industrial belt of southern Scotland than it was in south-west England. In Somerset there was no rapid growth of heavy industry in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries and it was the agricultural sector (itself low-paid in comparison to other areas, because of the state of the labour market) that set the wages 'floor' in the mining district.

The wages issue (allied to hopes for the nationalisation of the mines) dominated labour relations in the coal industry from 1919 to 1926. The miners' aggressive attitudes owed much to their determination to defend war-time gains and to satisfy rising aspirations. During the period of government control, financial administration was centralised and district wage settlements were replaced by national pay awards.⁽³⁹⁾ Between September 1917 and November 1918, two flat-rate advances (known as 'the war wage') of 1/6 d per day were made to all adult workers underground and in 1919 (on the recommendation of the Sankey Commission) the miners were awarded an additional 2/- per day. In most areas there were also increases in the minimum wage rates and in day

39. The first World War and immediate post war years are covered in Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, 'The Great War and Political Crisis 1914-1921', p.p. 43-161. Cf. R. P. Arnot, The Miners; Years of Struggle from 1910 Onwards (1953). See also J.R. Raynes, Coal and its Conflicts (1928); R.A.S. Redmayne, The British Coal Mining Industry During the War (Oxford, 1923); G.D.H. Cole, Labour in the Coal Mining Industry, 1914-1921, Economic and Social History of the World War (Oxford, 1923).

rates. The total percentage increase in wages for piecework coal-getters between 1914 and 1920 was an average 169 for Great Britain as a whole, 184 per cent in Scotland and 233 per cent in Somerset.(40)

As Captain Gill (prospective Labour candidate for the Frome constituency) pointed out in an article in the Somerset Guardian in March 1921:

The conflict now proceeding is fought on the wages issue because the abnormal circumstances of the moment have made it such. The driving force behind it is something much more spiritual and, therefore, fundamental. It is an assertion to a higher social status, a less monotonous mode of life, an existence offering more incident, interest and variety of experience than the mineworker can obtain under existing conditions.(41)

In the week that the back-dated Sankey award was paid, an extra £50,000 was added to the wages bill in Somerset alone.(42) However, in his article of 1921 Captain Gill spelled out the fact that wages had been pushed up to a point where, if the levels were maintained, the Somerset coalfield would have to 'survive as a non-paying concern in the ordinary economic sense'.(43) A return to district settlements and a lowering of wages was inevitable once decontrol was rushed through (in March 1921)(44) but there was a proliferation of claims and counter claims from unions and coal owners up to 1926 about the miners' wage in relation to costs of living. Walter Beard dismissed the Somerset

40. Cole, Labour in the Mining Industry, p.p.64-65.

41. Somerset Guardian, May 20, 1921

42. Somerset Guardian, May 2, 1921

43. Somerset Guardian, May 20, 1921. Gill, a former miner from South Wales, was prospective Labour candidate for the Frome constituency from 1918 until his death in 1923.

44. The topic of decontrol is featured in sources given under f.n. 39. See also R.H. Tawney, 'The Abolition of Economic Controls, 1918-21', Ec. Hist. Review, First Series, vol. XIII (1943), p.p. 14-16

owner's 1921 offer of £2/8/6d for a forty-eight hour week as equivalent in purchasing power to a pre-war wage of 19/4d., a sum that 'would scarcely buy the barest necessities of life.'⁽⁴⁵⁾ Similarly, the Lothian miners' wages of 45/- to 55/- per week in 1925 were said to be at best equal to only 25/- to 30/- in pre-1914 terms and that any reduction would 'leave the miner to live on crusts and water.'⁽⁴⁶⁾

Both sides selected statistics to prove their case but the general conclusion of the 1925 Samuel Commission was that all that could be said with certainty was that wages at the minimum percentage (as they were in the second half of 1925) and the miners' cost of living had risen in about the same proportion since 1914 but that, if there was any difference, it was probably in favour of wages having risen slightly more.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In addition to the movement in average wages and regional variations, a miner's economic position was also affected by local customs of allowances or indirect benefits and costs to be met out of wages. Lothian men could purchase coal at concessionary prices whereas Somerset miners were allowed 3 cwt. of free "bag coal" per week, although the amount was reduced pro rata when the pits worked short time.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Company housing, not free but let at

45. Somerset Guardian, May 6, 1921

46. Labour Standard (Edinburgh), April 25, 1925.

47. Report of the R.C. on the Coal Industry (1925), Vol. I, cmd 2600, 1926.

48. *ibid.*, Table 36, p.247 In the Lothians between 1913 and 1924 an average of 106 individuals received free coal (presumably officials), and coal at concessionary prices was sold annually to 7652 employees. 3,852 men in Somerset received free coal and none was supplied at concessionary prices. The information was based on returns from 96 per cent of the Lothian industry and 91 per cent of that in Somerset.

comparatively low rents, was a feature of the Lothians but it was of less significance in Somerset.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In both areas men provided their own tools, paid to have their picks sharpened and were charged for candles or lamps.

Piecework was the norm in the industry for coal-getters and others engaged in underground ancillary work capable of being measured by the piece. Such men represented in all approximately 40 per cent of the total mining labour force in 1924, the other 60 per cent being day-wage workers paid by the shift.⁽⁵⁰⁾ In theory, the system went some way to compensate for the difficulties of supervision in mining, by linking earnings to output, but in practice it gave the miner considerable opportunities to regulate his efforts. 'Ca' canny' or going slow was an integral part of the policies of early trade unions in the Scottish mining industry⁽⁵¹⁾ but in most coalfields output went up just before pay days or holidays. The degree of autonomy that the system gave the miners was however modified in the Lothians where, as we have seen, the distribution of wages was controlled by the contractors and work was increasingly mechanised. In Somerset the practice of paying a 'consideration' to men working in abnormal places (which were numerous) had fallen into disuse by the 1920s and it became increasingly common to pay breakers

49. *ibid.*, Table 37, p.247. In the year 1913, forty six colliery-owned houses were occupied free of charge in Somerset and 421 were let at rentals ranging from 1/- but under 2/- to 6/- but under 7/-. Eighty-eight rent-free houses were recorded in the Lothians with a further 3,955 being let at rentals from less than 1/- per week to 8/- but under 9/-.

50. Preface to the Report of the Court of Inquiry into Conditions in the Coal Industry (Coal Mining Dispute, 1924), Cmd. 2129 (1924), p.6, para. 6.

51. A.J.Y. Browne, 'Trade Union Policy in the Scots Coalfields, 1855 - 1885', Ec. Hist. Review (Second Series), IV, 1 (1953), pp.35-50

and carters a day wage instead of a piece rate. Moreover, there was little incentive for a miner to increase his efforts if management manipulated the system to the disadvantage of the men, as the directors of Pensford and Bromley collieries did. In January 1922 the Board decided that although it could not risk the likely consequences of ignoring the Minimum Wage Act, piece rates should 'be so worked out that when paid with the present district percentage they be at the minimum wage of the district.'⁽⁵²⁾ One significant difference in the coalfields was in wage-differentials between various categories of labour. These were relatively small in Somerset, where underground oncost workers earned 1/2 to 3/4 d. less per shift than a breaker at the face in 1921. (see Table 11 : 111).

TABLE 11 : 111
Wage Differentials (1921), Somerset

Category	per shift	per 6-shift week
	s .. d	s .. d
Breakers, less than Branchers	6	3 .. 0
Labourers, less than Breakers	1 .. 2 3/4	7 .. 4 1/2
Carting Boys (21+) less than Breakers	8 1/2	4 .. 6

SOURCE: S.M.A figures, Somerset Guardian, April 8 1921

At the six Lothian mines owned by Edinburgh Collieries Co. Ltd. in 1922, underground oncost men earned an average of just over 3/7d less per shift than the coal getters but the differential varied from colliery to colliery, in a range from 1/8d to 7/3d less per shift.

52. Minutes, Directors Meetings, Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd., NCB/BP/6-84, Box 5, January 12, 1922

TABLE 11 : 111 A
Wage differentials (1922), Edinburgh Collieries Co. Ltd.

Colliery	Coal getters, less than Brushers				Underground Oncost, less than Getters			
	per shift		per 6-shift week		per shift		per 6-shift week	
	s .. d		£.. s .. d		s .. d		£.. s .. d	
Wallyford		11		5 .. 6		1 .. 8		10 .. 0
Carberry	2 .. 2			13 .. 0		3 .. 3		19 .. 6
Prestonlinks	2 .. 0	1/2		12 .. 3		2 .. 4		14 .. 0
Bankton	2 .. 3			13 .. 6		2 .. 0		12 .. 0
Fleets	4 .. 8		1..28	.. 0		7 .. 3	2..	3 .. 6
Bellyford	2 .. 9			16 .. 6		1 .. 8		10 .. 0

SOURCE: Edinburgh Collieries Records, CB 29/1, WRH.

Occupational status was closely related to level of earnings in the industry and the relatively low differentials in Somerset were another factor (together with the comparative lack of job specialisation ⁽⁵³⁾) that diminished the dominance of the breakers. In the Lothians there were sharp divisions in status and earnings between men who worked at the face and underground on-cost labour and also between underground workers in general and surface workers.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Circumstances in Somerset were therefore

53. See above, p.65.

54. Women employed on the washeries and screening tables were at the bottom of both the status and the wages league. There is no evidence to suggest that they belonged to the union or that MELMA made any attempt to organise them; although few in number they were a potential threat to organised workers. The Loanhead committee reported in June 1920 that women at the colliery had approached the manager with an offer to take over the jobs of male surface workers, who were in dispute with the owners. See below p.128 for numbers of women employed in the Lothian coal industry. This is a neglected area of the social history of mining but see Angela John, By the Sweat of their Brow (1984). For women in the metal-mines see G.Burke, 'The Decline of the Independant Bal Maiden: The Impact of Change in the Cornish Mining Industry', A. John (ed), Unequal Opportunities. Womens' Employment in England, 1800-1918 (Oxford, 1986), p.p.179-201.

less conducive to sectionalism than in the Lothians but the proliferation of job-titles in the smaller coalfield suggests that, nonetheless, men were eager to distinguish their particular task as something of a specialist one. Not only were categories of labour more numerous⁽⁵⁵⁾ but underground oncost men (who earned the same as carters, aged over twenty one, on day rates) were frequently identified in pay claims or awards not merely as 'day labourers' but as 'horse drivers', 'incline men', 'trammers' or 'runners'.

This tendency to dignify unskilled labour and to construct a status-system based on narrowly-defined work tasks could be seen as a form of sectionalism, evolved in response to the low wage differentials and the lack of specialisation. It could, however, be argued that it was an expression of the social and political consciousness of the Somerset miners. Certainly the language of trade unionists, Labour activists and of men who contributed personal testimony to this study suggests that society was widely perceived as consisting of a hierarchy in which everyone had their place and in which the notion of the dignity of labour had some meaning.

Indeed, the values and attitudes of many Somerset miners largely coincided with those of the agricultural workers studied by

55. Branchers (stonedriers) earned higher average wages than breakers, although the difference per shift was only a few pence. On the same rates as breakers were timber men (who repaired roadways) and 'hitchers', who supervised the cages at pit-bottom. Oncost surface labour included 'veerers.' The title seems to have distinguished former breakers from men who had never worked at the face. The task of the veerers was to move trams between the top of the shaft and the railway sidings. In the late nineteenth century many of them were extremely elderly, often in their seventies or even eighties. The term became obsolete in the early 1920s, almost certainly because elderly and unfit men were then more likely to be sacked than found work on the surface.

Newby, men who recognised disparities of power and the existence of a social hierarchy but viewed their relationship with those above them as one of mutuality and harmonious interdependence. Independence and self-respect, according to Newby, were an integral part of what he defined as "organic" deference, which was maintained on a basis of consensus about clearly defined rights and duties.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Events at Mells Colliery between the wars provide one example of the collective manifestation of class harmony in Somerset. Mells Collieries Ltd. was in a parlous financial state for most of its existence, culminating in losses of over £69,000 in the years 1922 to 1924. By 1930 the Company was in receivership but it proved impossible to sell it as a going concern. At the instigation of Lady Horner, the Mells Estates took over the colliery with the primary aim of avoiding job losses, although it was hoped that with substantial investment the pit might become profitable.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Lady Horner took a close interest in running the colliery and met the union officials and (on many occasions) the entire workforce, to discuss plans for keeping the pit working. All was not harmony on a day to day basis at Mells but the miners responded to Lady Horner's benevolent intentions by co-operating in attempts to improve output. In June 1932 they went so far as to voluntarily accept a 10 per cent wage cut. Significantly, the

56. H.Newby, 'The Deferential Dialectic', Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol.17, Part 2(April, 1975), p.p.139-64; for an elaborated illustration of Newby's argument see Newby, 'Agricultural Workers in the Class Structure', Sociological Review, Vol.XX, 3(1972), p.p.413-39, which supersedes the conceptualisation of deference in C.Bell and H.Newby, 'The Sources of Variation in Agricultural Workers' Images of Society', Soc. Rev., Vol.XXI, 2(1973).

57. Down & Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.p. 229-33.

wording of the agreement stated that this proportion of wages was to be 'held back as a loan for investment purposes', to be repaid when economic circumstances improved. The venture eventually failed and the union finally took action to try to recover the wages but, nonetheless, Lady Horner earned high praise from union officials for her attitudes as a colliery director. In the late 1930s the SMA agent publicly regretted that 'there were not more like her Ladyship' among the Somerset coal owners,⁽⁵⁸⁾ an opinion subsequently endorsed by the pit lodge chairman and the workforce.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Lady Horner, aristocratic, benevolent and anxious to protect the miners' jobs was a close approximation to the ideal coal-owners recalled by A.J.Parfitt.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In contrast, Sir Frank Beauchamp has been almost mythologised into an oppressive tyrant because his policy of buying up and closing pit after pit was a significant factor in the decline of employment in the Somerset mining industry between the wars. Numbers employed fell from around 7,000 in the early 1920s to 3,245 by the end of 1938.⁽⁶¹⁾ As in other coalfields the most rapid period of decline occurred in the decade 1923-1933, when numbers employed dropped from 5,634 to 3,546.⁽⁶²⁾

58. Somerset Guardian, August 13, 1937

59. *ibid*; Minute Books, SMA, BUL, January 27, 1939.

60. See above, p.54.

61. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), Table VII, p.55; Report of the Board of Trade Under Part 1 of the Coal Mines Act (1931), from December quarter 1937, CMD 6170 (1938)

62. W.Glynn Morgan, 'The Mobility of Labour in the Principal Industries of Somerset, 1923-1933', M.A. dissertation, University College Wales, 1934, p.95. Glynn Morgan's dissertation has acquired considerable value over the years since it was written. It contains a wealth of statistical information on occupational mobility and is based on a variety of key sources that have not survived the intervening period, including figures from local unemployment offices.

In the Lothians the size of the workforce diminished quite sharply between the early 1920s and the years after the 1926 dispute. Total numbers employed fell from over 15,000 in the period 1922 to 1925 to just over 13,000 in 1927. Numbers unemployed in the Scottish coal industry at October 24, 1927, included 1,828 in Midlothian but only three in East Lothian.⁽⁶³⁾ Thereafter employment held up relatively well in Mid and East Lothian (far better than in the older coalfields of Scotland), with 12,798 men still working in the industry in December 1938.

TABLE 11:1V
TOTAL NUMBERS EMPLOYED IN THE COAL MINES OF
SOMERSET AND THE LOTHIANS, 1921 - 1938.

YEAR	SOMERSET			THE LOTHIANS		
	UNDER GROUND	SURFACE	TOTAL	UNDER GROUND	SURFACE	TOTAL
1921	4,923	977	5,900	11,222	3,307	14,529
1922	4,306	922	5,228	11,560	3,619	15,179
1923	4,712	959	5,671	12,131	3,661	15,792
1924 (1)	4,974	894	5,868	12,144	3,503	15,647
1925	4,316	849	5,165	11,790	3,258	15,048
1926 (2)	3,351	658	4,009	9,273	2,851	12,124
1927	3,577	690	4,267	10,214	3,065	13,279
1928	3,477	647	4,124	9,411	2,921	12,332
1929	3,404	650	4,054	10,200	3,053	13,253
1930	3,110	625	3,735	10,116	3,111	13,227
1931	2,998	607	3,605	9,491	2,952	12,443
1932	3,015	619	3,634	9,320	2,925	12,245
1933	2,970	599	3,569	9,234	2,974	12,208
1934	2,905	589	3,494	9,251	2,902	12,153
1935	2,789	570	3,359	9,149	2,934	12,083
1936	2,774	587	3,361	9,279	2,974	12,253
1937	2,710	594	3,304	9,736	3,102	12,838
1938	2,632	621	3,253	9,701	3,097	12,798

SOURCE: Statistical Tables, Annual Reports of the Mines Inspectorate, 1921 to 1938.

Notes: (1) Figures for 1921 to 1923 include clerks and salaried employees in the total numbers of surface workers.

(2) at 11 Dec 1926

63. Figures from a statement circulated among M.P.s by the Minister of Labour in response to a question in the House about the number of unemployed miners in Scotland. The statement covers all the Scottish coalfields and gives the number of miners out of work in each county at October 24, 1927. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, Vol. 210 [177], November 9, 1927.

Mounting unemployment in Somerset prompted several initiatives to start worker-co-operative enterprises, for there was still scope for drift mines in the county and the scale of the industry was such that the amount of capital required to start a company was small compared to what would have been needed in most coalfields. When Lord Warwick's Clutton pit closed shortly after the 1921 dispute ended there were rumours of a company being formed to reopen it. Lady Warwick (renowned for her socialism and her philanthropy⁽⁶⁴⁾) was a key figure in this but her interest in the idea of a co-operative came too late, after pumping had stopped and the equipment had been partially dismantled. Dunkerton colliery was the subject of numerous reopening schemes in the late 1920s, the most definite being proposed in March 1929 by a Major Mackintosh who wanted the colliery to be leased to unemployed miners. Sir Frank Beauchamp expressed some sympathy with the plan but demanded an exorbitant rent. He later agreed to lend equipment free of charge to the men but negotiations were inconclusive and eventually abandoned. The only successful venture was the Marsh Lane drift mine, opened by fifty unemployed miners who each held £5-worth of shares in the company. The initial success of the drift owed much to the mineral owner, the Duchy of Cornwall, for all dues under the lease were waived until the pit was working profitably.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The fact that such ideas

64. The Countess of Warwick performed the opening ceremony of the SMA's new offices at Radstock in 1905, accompanied by her 'good friend and comrade, Will Thorne.' Thorne was a prominent New Unionist, leader of the gas workers and prospective Labour candidate for West Ham. Both he and Lady Warwick were members of the most-Marxist (or quasi-Marxist) of the British socialist organisations, the Social Democratic Federation. Somerset Guardian, July 8, 1905. The Countess is the subject of Chapter 9, 'Daisy Warwick' in P. Brent, The Edwardians (1972); see also M. Blunden, The Countess of Warwick (1967) and Thorne's My Life's Battles (1925; 1989).

65. Information on the various schemes is taken from Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, passim.

were raised is, however, of more significance than the failure of most of the projects. Taking over or starting a mine was still a realistic possibility for Somerset miners, albeit with help of some sort from employers or royalty holders. It is highly unlikely that this would have been considered in the Lothians, where the working collier as coal master was a figure firmly located in the past.

Short-time working in Somerset also helped to sustain other features more often associated with the coal industry of the early nineteenth century than that of the inter-war years of the twentieth century. Regularity of work was characteristic of the Lothians although numbers employed in the mines did fluctuate slightly from month to month.

TABLE 11 : V
Changes in Numbers Employed, by Occupational Category.
Edinburgh Collieries, 1928

Colliery	Coal Getters			Brushers			Underground Oncost			Surface oncost		
	Jan	June	Dec	Jan	June	Dec	Jan	June	Dec	Jan	June	Dec
Wallyford	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	15	17	46	59	61
Carberry	217	254	186	72	75	97	155	172	170	134	146	144
Prestonlinks	263	330	497	135	170	211	150	160	243	178	199	257
Bankton	124	-	-	44	-	-	55	3	3	44	9	3
Fleets	-	-	-	-	-	76	6	6	123	10	5	85
Company Total	604	584	683	251	245	384	356	380	556	412	418	540

SOURCE: Edinburgh Collieries, Misc. Papers, CB 29/1, WRH.

In Somerset, throughout its pre-nationalisation history, short-time working was the norm. Changes in seasonal demand were only slightly modified by working some gas and steam coal from the deeper seams mined from around the mid-nineteenth century. Apart

from the war years, it was only for relatively brief periods of high demand that the coalfield worked to capacity.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Consequently, the tradition of miners working on the land in the summer months, particularly at hay-making time, persisted. Moreover, in 1919 and again in 1920 the SMA was dealing with complaints from the Agricultural Labourers Union about the number of miners regularly working on farms after finishing their shift in the pits.⁽⁶⁷⁾ There is also plenty of oral evidence to suggest that many miners owned or rented enough land to be worked as a smallholding. This personal testimony is supported by Sir Frank Beauchamp's evidence to the 1919 Sankey Commission⁽⁶⁸⁾ and reinforced by material in the lightly-fictionalised memoirs of Dr. Kenneth Jones, who practised medicine in the Norton-Radstock area between 1929 and the early 1970s.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Ownership and access to land is impossible to quantify but it might well have been sufficient to provide opportunities for a type of "peasant enterprise" that gave miners some degree of independence. This was so in the case of Henry Moon, who appeared at Radstock magistrates court in June 1932 in connection with an application from his estranged wife for maintenance for herself

66. Periods of full-time working were usually commented on, as exceptional, in the local paper between 1890-1939. It seems likely that the work experience of a shot-firer killed in an explosion in 1895 was not uncommon. His widow told a Somerset Guardian reporter that in the fourteen months prior to his death, her husband had worked only one full six-shift week. Somerset Guardian, February 16, 1895.

67. See below, p.p.124-25.

68. Beauchamp suggested that although wages were low in Somerset the fact that many miners owned small amounts of land, as well as their own houses, indicated that levels of pay were not inadequate.

69. K. Lane, Diary of a Medical Nobody (Corgi paperback edition, 1982); West Country Doctor (Corgi paperback edition, 1984), passim

and the two children of the marriage. It was stated that the miner 'occupied four and a half acres of land' at Clapton (near Midsomer Norton) and that he had bought his house three years previously for £300, of which £192 was owing on mortgage. Moon, under oath, described himself as 'a miner and keep fowls'. He told the court that he had done no work in the pits for five weeks as he 'had to stay at home to look out for the poultry.' Prior to that, he said, he had been working four shifts a week fairly regularly although in the winter he would expect to work five or six shifts weekly but, he added, he 'would not go under 8/- a shift.'⁽⁷⁰⁾ Henry Moon may well have been exceptional. He is undoubtedly a surprisingly "independent collier" to find in the Somerset coalfield as late as 1932. It seems that Moon, although a wage-earner in the pits, was in a position to make a choice between putting his effort into his poultry-keeping business or working in the mines. If shift-rates fell below a certain standard (even in winter, when presumably egg production and income from the flock were at their lowest) he could apparently afford to withhold his labour until wage rates improved. Yet it is hardly likely that he was unique among a total workforce of over 3,500 and certainly access to land seems to have been of considerable importance in the family economy of miners in Somerset.

Identifying such continuities is often an easier task than recapturing the dynamic element of a period but processes of change were underway in both coalfields and these need to be considered, as influence on attitudes to pit work.

70. Somerset Guardian, June 25, 1932

Intensification of mechanisation and a subtle change in the organisation of work were key factors in the Lothians. Minor technological change and some degree of mechanisation were influential in Somerset but changes in organisation, in response to a growing shortage of juvenile labour, were of greater significance in that coalfield.

The earliest phase of mechanisation did not invariably break up the tradition of family or friendship-based work groups, working together on piece rates in numbers of four, six or ten and receiving a joint pay note.⁽⁷¹⁾ The first machines used at the face merely undercut the coal, leaving it to be freed by hand-pick, and mechanisation of the haulage initially involved only the replacement of tubs by conveyors in main roadways. The development of face conveyors, however, allowed for the operation of much longer faces and increased the division of labour. Not only did it enlarge the scale of operations but it necessitated a three-shift system of work, with the labour force sub-divided into shift-groups with distinct functions. In most of the Lothian mines at the end of the period the coal was undercut by machine, brought down by shot-firing and loaded onto a face conveyor (running parallel to a face of from 150' to 750') by teams of 'fillers'. Mechanisation replaced "the complete collier" of the earlier days and of technologically-backward districts like Somerset with two kinds of face-worker: mechanics who worked and serviced the machinery and others, who were primarily manual labourers.⁽⁷²⁾ The first group had some claim to a status

71. M.A.Walter, 'The Coal Miner This Century: Social and Economic Relationships in the Light of the Changing Labour Process', M.A. dissertation, University of Keele, 1981, p.p. 116-17

72. Report of R.C. on Safety in the Coal Mines, 1935-1938, Cmd 5890 (1938), p. 46.

similar to that of the colliery craftsmen. Depending on personal view point, miners either regard this type of worker as a mere "machine-minder" or else they see mechanisation as a process of upgrading through the acquisition of new skills. There was less ambivalence about the coal hewer transformed into a filler, as the frequent perjorative use of the term "dirt shoveller" suggests.⁽⁷³⁾ Nonetheless, Lothian miners in general seem to have associated mechanisation with new skills rather than with any sense of being "de-skilled". Men who started in the pits in the 1930s but did not retire until the 1970s or 1980s speak of mechanisation 'coming in after 1947.' When pressed, they agree with the description of methods in the late thirties as given above but they view the pre-war era with hindsight, and regard those methods as somewhat primitive. Mechanisation training courses were a common experience in the post-nationalisation years, as technological advances in the late 1950s and 1960s (notably the development of power loaders) transformed the process from its semi-mechanised state into a completely mechanical one. Their relatively favourable response to mechanisation reflects the more forward-looking attitudes of Lothian men in comparison to Somerset miners but it also raises questions about theories and assumptions relating to the impact of technological change in the labour process.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Alienation and anomie did not necessarily or inexorably follow from either the scale of the industry, the division of labour or

73. Young men currently working in almost fully-automated pits use this term, as do Somerset miners (who have a nostalgic attachment to traditional methods) when referring to coal fillers.

74. A useful documentary-essay on de-skilling in the coal industry is A. Campbell's 'Colliery Mechanisation and the Lanarkshire Miners,' Bulletin SSLH, 49 (Autumn 1984)

mechanisation of the process. It is true that medical observers noted an increase in morbidity and psychosomatic illness amongst miners between the late 1920s and the second World War⁽⁷⁵⁾ and at least one doctor was confident that this was related to a growth of anomie as mechanisation increased the impersonality of social relationships in the mines.⁽⁷⁶⁾ However, it could be argued that the increased levels of dust, noise and minor accidents associated with underground machinery created a common grievance that potentially provided a unifying focus for solidarity within large primary work groups and between shift groups. Moreover, there is evidence that miners and the general public had a positive attitude to mechanisation, regarding it as beneficial to the workforce despite the theories and opinions of some sociologists, psychologists or other "experts".

In 1946 the Social Survey conducted an inquiry into the recruitment of boys to the mining industry. It was specifically concerned with attitudes of parents and boys living in the coalfields towards mining as a job. Questionnaires were issued in six areas,⁽⁷⁷⁾ followed up by interviews with parents of boys aged thirteen to eighteen and by separate interviews with the boys. Mining and non-mining families were included in the sample. Mechanisation was frequently mentioned by all respondents as one of the 'improved conditions underground' which would attract boys to mining. A clear majority of parents (somewhat

75. Walter, op. cit., p. 137

76. J.N. Morris, 'Coal Miners', The Lancet, 2 (1947), p. 341. (Not read, reference taken from Walter's thesis, op. cit., p.137, f.n.2.)

77. RG 23/85, PRO, Recruitment of boys to the Mining Industry. The inquiry was carried out between August and October 1946, in the coalfields of Fife, Durham, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire and South Wales.

more from non-mining than from mining families) and 75 per cent of the boys thought that mechanisation would make mining a better job, largely because it would make the work easier and (to a lesser extent) because it would improve output. It was also thought that mechanisation would improve conditions underground and make the work safer and more interesting. The report on the inquiry concluded that 'In general it would seem that mechanisation could be of considerable help to recruitment and assist in the recognition of mining as a skilled job and an interesting job.' (78)

The miners' skill was always essentially job related and not readily transferable to other occupations. Recognition of the fact that a skilled miner leaving the pits would have to compete in the wider labour market as an unskilled worker was often a strong incentive for staying in the mines. Yet, within the pits, the intensification of mechanisation might seem likely to have boosted the self-esteem of the Lothian miners and this was further enhanced by changes in the organisation of work. The prevalence of the contractor system meant that traditional social and economic relations in the work place were broken down in the earliest stages of mechanisation in the Lothians. Even before the introduction of face-conveyors (that is, at a time when the face was not exceptionally long and the primary work group was still relatively small) the work group was not self-selecting and if it was re-formed this was done at the will of the contractor, not the members of the group. Moreover, the joint wage was not shared equally and its distribution was also controlled by the contractor.

78. *ibid*; p. 17

Opposition to the prevailing system grew throughout the period.⁽⁷⁹⁾ By the late 1930s it had (according to some eight men who worked at Prestongrange⁽⁸⁰⁾) largely been replaced by a form of organisation that was substantially the same but based on collective principles. Under the pooling system, as it was known, twenty or so men chose a 'leading man' whose responsibilities were to make the contract, deal with management and officials, collect and distribute wages and make sure that everything was ready at the face when a shift began. There were no wage differentials in this system and work was shared on a co-operative basis, with the youngest and fittest men compensating by their efforts for the less able among the group. Members of a pool were concerned to select workmates of similar skill, strength and productivity but the system did provide an opportunity for younger miners to support older men, as long as they were fit to work at the face, and there was an incentive to assist one another in the common objective of boosting the group pay. Mark Roseman has argued that 'one of the most important ways in which miners demonstrated and experienced solidarity was in working together for a single wage which was shared out according

79. Lothian miners recall the growing opposition to contractors as being linked with the generally more-aggressive attitudes of the communist-breakaway U.M.S. but getting the pooling system established owed much to the increasing assertiveness of the workforce in the mid to late 1930s. Once the UMS was reabsorbed into MELMA (see below, p.186.), the official union stepped up its opposition to the contractor system.

80. These men were most insistent that 'pooling' was becoming commonplace. Although their own experience was confined to one pit they claim that through contacts with other Lothian miners they know that the system was spreading. An eight-day strike at Edinburgh Collieries Carberry pit in the spring of 1934 was 'against introduction of a contract system of working, work people desiring to revert to pool system'. Labour disputes mss. LAB 34/49 (PRO)

to set percentage rates between the hewers and putters'.(81) Longwall mining threatened this wage form in the Ruhr collieries in Germany between the wars, because when a group contract encompassed forty or fifty men there could be considerable discrepancies between individual effort and the wage received. However, in the Lothian pits the twenty or more men on a filling shift were distributed along the face virtually shoulder to shoulder and all performing the same task, of shovelling coal into the face-conveyor. The pooling system thus represented an adaption to modern conditions of a traditionally more-collective approach to work. The pool was self-selecting, its leader was democratically chosen and the group wage was equally distributed. Moreover, the system fostered mutual trust between members of a pool, for they relied on one another's willingness to work and also on their readiness to accept common norms of output and effort.

The group wage was, meanwhile, rapidly becoming a thing of the past in Somerset where it was increasingly common for breakers and carters to be paid individually. Moreover, the tendency of piece rates to encourage individualistic approaches to work was to some extent offset by the growing practice of paying face workers by the hour, on a standard day wage. The general trend in output per manshift worked at the coalface in Somerset was one of decline from 1930 to 1939 but although the fall in o.m.s coincided with the erosion of piece rates in favour of day wages, there was not necessarily any relationship between the two.

81. M. Roseman, 'Weakening the bonds: reconstruction and change in the mining community in the era before the coal crisis', Unpublished paper presented at Conference on Mining in Great Britain and in Ruhr, University of the Ruhr, Bochum, West Germany, December 1986.

TABLE II : VI

OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL PER MANSHIFT WORKED,
SOMERSET, 1930 - 1939

Year	Output per Manshift Worked			Manshifts at the Coalface as% of All Manshifts Worked
	At the Coalface cwts.	Underground cwts	All Wage Earners cwts	
1930	38.10	20.26	16.24	42.63
1931	37.07	19.45	15.67	42.27
1932	38.81	18.81	15.10	41.04
1933	36.99	19.06	15.33	41.44
1934	35.90	19.24	15.46	43.05
1935	34.64	19.63	15.83	45.71
1936	34.43	20.12	16.22	47.10
1937	34.15	20.00	16.11	47.19
1938	34.31	19.95	15.85	46.20
1939	35.39	19.98	15.70	44.36

SOURCE: Regional Survey of the Coalfields, Bristol and Somerset.

The change in wage form may well have been a contributory factor in the decline of output but a multi-causal explanation seems the most likely and it would include the fact that in the same period the work force was becoming an increasingly elderly one.⁽⁸²⁾ A lack of juvenile recruits to the industry had implications beyond the ageing of the workforce, for owners tried to compensate for it by a closer direction of labour rather than by extensive mechanisation.

The rate of mechanisation in British mines was by no means uniform,⁽⁸³⁾ nor was it so at regional level. In spite of the disincentives discussed above⁽⁸⁴⁾ experiments were being made with machinery in Somerset during the first World War and beyond. Beauchamp had one coal cutter at work in his pits in 1919 but had

82. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), Table IX, p.28; p.29

83. D. Greasley, 'The Diffusion of Machine Cutting in the British Coal Industry, 1902-1938', Explorations in Economic History, 19, 3 (1982), p.p 246-68.

84. Above, p.29.

withdrawn several conveyors 'because the seams are so thin and the district is so disturbed with faults, that we never get a long enough face to install conveyors successfully'.⁽⁸⁵⁾ As we have seen, there were two coal cutters at work in 1928⁽⁸⁶⁾ but between 1930 and 1941 the position in the coalfield as regards conveyors was almost static and the trend was towards a reduction in numbers of coal cutters, in the quantity of coal undercut by machine and in the proportion of output mechanically cut.

TABLE II : VII
COAL CUTTERS AT WORK, SOMERSET, 1930 - 1939

Year	Number of Mines Using Cutters	Number of Machines	Quantity of Coal Cut Tons.	Production of Coal Cut %
1930	2	5	82,221	10
1931	2	5	78,322	10
1932	2	5	75,518	10
1933	4	8	65,199	9
1934	3	5	70,481	10
1935	3	6	64,552	9
1936	2	3	53,253	7
1937	4	5	48,766	6
1938	5	7	69,686	9
1939	4	5	49,840	7

SOURCE: Regional Survey of the Coalfields, Bristol & Somerset.

TABLE II : VIII
CONVEYORS AND LOADERS, SOMERSET, 1930 - 1939

Year	Number of Mines	Number of Machines		Tonnage Conveyed	% of Total
		Conveyors	Loaders		
1930	3	7	-	104,557	13
1931	3	7	-	113,532	14
1932	3	7	-	112,383	16
1933	3	7	-	100,792	14
1934	4	6	-	99,977	14
1935	4	7	-	98,683	14
1936	3	6	-	98,741	13
1937	4	8	-	112,011	15
1938	4	10	-	110,571	15
1939	4	9	1	96,097	13

SOURCE: Regional Survey of the Coalfields, Bristol & Somerset.

85. R.C. on the Coal Industry (1919) Cmd 360
86. Above, p.p.74-5.

There is no evidence of outright opposition to mechanisation in Somerset although there was some concern about deteriorating working conditions, particularly about the potential health risks of the increased levels of dust. Machine cutting also increased the quantity of dirt extracted. This varied nationally from thirty five to eighty five tram loads per 100 trams of coal and although much of the dust was stored in the goaf large quantities had to be transported to the shaft and wound to the surface⁽⁸⁷⁾, thus adding to the costs of production. After coal cutters were installed at Pensford the number of trams of dirt wound per shift increased from an unspecified number to forty per shift.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The increase was sufficiently great to prompt the owners to devise a new method for deducting bag coal (which was normally done by discounting the first load a company sent up) and the coal allowance to men on mechanised faces was reduced.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Men working on machines, however, tried to improve their economic position either by a direct demand for higher pay or by attempting to re-define their occupational category and then claiming an improved wage-rate for their tasks. Management at Pensford and Bromley wanted a reduction in tonnage rates from 1/- to 9d. when conveyors were first introduced in the 1930s but the men asked for an increase from 1/- to 1/3d 'for the new method of carting coal.' At Pensford the men refused to work on conveyors at lower rates and the machines were temporarily withdrawn but at Bromley 'the position was a little difficult as some of the men said the new method was an improvement, whereas others refused to work it at reduced prices.' It was left to the Bromley lodge

87. From thirty five to eighty five trams of dirt per 100 trams of coal were wound to the surface in Somerset collieries.

88. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.64

89. Minute Books, SMA, BUL, November 27, 1929.

committee and the men to resolve the dispute.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Conveyors were evidently accepted at Pensford eventually (though there is no evidence about what tonnage rates were agreed) but a short strike occurred at the colliery in 1936, over 'non-payment for the erection of cogs.' This was settled on the mens' terms after one shift had been lost.⁽⁹¹⁾ The 'chog shifters' (presumably those men who moved the machinery forward) at Kilmersdon were trying unsuccessfully to raise their wage rates throughout 1938 and 1939. The lodge finally decided to ask management to revise wage scales 'under conditions where modern machine methods of output have varied grades of work.'⁽⁹²⁾

While mechanisation made a direct impact on the working lives of only a minority of Somerset miners, many more were affected by some degree of technological change, particularly by the increasing use of pneumatic drills and picks. This provoked considerable opposition, largely because of the SMA's vigorous campaign to get the regulations covering compensation for silicosis amended. Under the Refractory Industries (Silicosis) Scheme (1919), silicosis was not classified as an industrial disease associated with coal mining and, therefore, miners could not make claims under the Workmens Compensation (Silicosis) Act of 1918. The 1911 Mines Act contained a clause that prohibited branchers drilling sandstone except in exceptional circumstances and then only on condition that precautions to reduce dust were taken. The law, however, soon became a dead letter. As the

90. *ibid*; April 27, 1934

91. *ibid*; May 29, 1936

92. Minute Books, Writhlington and Kilmersdon Lodge Committee (SMA archive, BUL), September 20, 1938; February 7, 1939.

leading authority on silicosis (Dr.J.S.Haldane) later acknowledged, the consequences of this were first detected in the Somerset coalfield through the persistent efforts of the S.M.A. agent, Fred Swift. Branchers (stonedriers) were at risk when driving roads through sandstone or other siliceous rocks, known locally as 'greys', and the risks were increased when powered drills rather than hand drills were used. About 4 per cent of the total labour force was normally accounted for by the branchers but there was a high degree of interchangeability between the occupational categories of brancher and coal breaker. The incidence of silicosis was higher in Somerset than in any other coalfield except Monmouth and South Wales.(93)

During the early 1920s, Swift became convinced that the disease was on the increase, although often misdiagnosed as chronic bronchitis or tuberculosis. With the help of two local doctors the agent amassed evidence as a basis from which to canvas support from the medical and legal professions, while the SMA formally lobbied the MFGB and the TUC to get government action on the issue. The campaign resulted in the Various Industries (Silicosis) Scheme, 1928, but although this included coalmining it was not retrospective and it left the onus of proof on the claimant, who had to provide evidence of having worked in rock containing at least 50 per cent free silica. The union therefore continued to campaign until the clause was eliminated, in the 1931 Scheme. Swift was still not satisfied, as he believed that the definition of silica rock was so restricted 'that it largely

93. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), p. 56.

nullified the presumed advantage of getting the free silica clause deleted.'⁽⁹⁴⁾ A more satisfactory definition was made in further amendments to the scheme in 1941, after which it included pneumoniconiosis as well as silicosis-diseases virtually identical in pathology and prognosis but caused by the inhalation of fine coal dust in the former and by specific rock dust in the latter.

The success of the campaign represented a major triumph for one of the smallest unions in the MFGB but the outcome, at local level, made an ambivalent impact on working lives. Men at Mells went on unofficial strike in September 1936, for fear of silicosis, when the manager insisted that the seam they were working on could not be worked economically without pneumatic picks being used. The SMA Council quickly adopted the strike in a resolution that affirmed its satisfaction that 'the action of the men, although irregular, was prompted by a genuine fear for which there are ample reasons.'⁽⁹⁵⁾ Following a two-week strike, the places in question were closed and the men officially laid off pending an investigation into the composition of the dust.

94. Misc. papers, Silicosis File (SMA, BUL), Swifts' notes on the 1931 amendments. Dr. Haldane acknowledged the importance of the SMA campaign in J.S. Haldane, 'Silicosis and Coal Mining', Transactions of the Institute of Mining Engineers, 80 (1931), p.p 415-51; see also A. Meiklejohn, 'History of Lung Diseases of Coal Miners in Great Britain,' British Journal of Industrial Medicine, 9, 2 (1952), p.p. 93-8. On the general health of the workforce in the 1940s see F.H.Kemp and D.C.Wilson, 'Social Ecology of the Radstock Coalfield', The Lancet (February 2, 1946), p.p. 172-3.

95. Minute Books, SMA, BUL, September 16, 1936

The subsequent report of the Mines Safety Research Board so 'distressed' the manager at Mells (with its positive proof of the danger of silicosis) that he went to considerable lengths to devise means of reducing dust levels.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Most employers and managers, however, were primarily concerned about the likely rise in compensation claims and costs, in a coalfield where the compensation bill was always proportionally high because of the low output.⁽⁹⁷⁾ By the mid 1930s compensation cases were 'more difficult and numerous than they have ever been' and most of those outstanding were claims relating to silicosis.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Managers increasingly refused to take back any man who had been off sick unless he submitted to a medical examination by a company doctor⁽⁹⁹⁾, while rates of compensation paid to disabled miners were arbitrarily reduced and a wages increase of 1936 was not granted in full to partially disabled men employed on light work.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Union protests over these tactics brought a rapid and characteristic response from Sir Frank Beauchamp, who wrote to the SMA to say that if men employed by Somerset Collieries Ltd. were not satisfied with company policy they could leave their jobs as soon as they pleased.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ From 1935, management at

96. Misc. papers, Silicosis File (SMA archive, BUL), Swift's notes on events at Mells, n.d., c. 1936.

97. Compensation costs were rising generally between the wars but it was the miners' eye disease, nystagmus, that accounted for the bulk of costs because of the large number of claims and the long average-duration of weekly payments. For several years prior to 1938, compensation for nystagmus was about £450,000 per annum in Great Britain, paid to an average of 10,000 miners. Report by the Department Committee on Certain Questions under the Workmen's Compensation Acts (Miner's Nystagmus), CMD 5627 (1938).

98. Minute Books, Writhlington and Kilmersden Lodge Committee (SMA archive, BUL), agents' monthly report to the lodge, July 18, 1934.

99. *ibid*; April 17, 1934.

100. Minute Books, SMA, BUL, April 17, 1936

101. *ibid*; May 29, 1936

Writhlington and Kilmersdon would employ 'only such workmen who could be certified as being in good health, as a safeguard against the management being held liable for compensation in cases in which physical weakness was a contributory cause towards claims for compensation payments.'^c(102) This soon became standard practice[^] throughout the coalfield.(103)

The SMA's other major campaign of the inter-war years was against the use of the guss, an agitation that had its origins chiefly in the decline of juvenile recruitment to the pits. The guss and crook has been described as the 'hall mark of Somerset mining' and it survived in the coalfield long after similar devices had been discarded in most parts of Britain.(104) It consisted of a circle of one-inch diameter tarred rope with the ends spliced together, worn around the waist with a chain of about fifteen inches hanging from the front. Attached to this was an elongated S-shaped hook or crook. In use, the carting boy would link this hook to an eye on the putt (coal tub) and crawl on all fours with the chain running between his legs, so as to drag the putt behind him.

The guss was a highly efficient piece of low-technology, with which quite heavy loads of coal could be moved by muscle power in circumstances where coal would not have been worked if the haulage had been mechanised. Wearing it was a painful and somewhat undignified initiation into the manly world of pit life

102. Minute Books, Wirthlington and Kilmersdon Lodge Committee (SMA archive, BUL), June 23, 1935.

103. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), p. 56

104. Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.48

at the coal face, to be spoken of with a certain amount of self-praise for physical endurance once it was a thing of the past. Most men recall that their flesh was rubbed raw by the guss in their first week or so of carting. The customary advice from fathers was 'rub thee piss into it, me son' but in respectable households mothers' insisted on bathing the sores with salt water. Most boys could expect to move from carting to work on the coalface in their late teens or early twenties during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and it was the move from carting to breaking that marked entry into full manhood in the pit.

By 1919, however, Beauchamp was already acutely aware of a shortage of juvenile labour and was considering the possibility of having to either discharge coal breakers or 'convert them' into carters.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ In December 1919 four breakers at Priston were given notice 'in consequence of carting boys leaving the colliery'.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Throughout the period increasingly coercive pressure was exerted by employers in an attempt to recruit and retain labour.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

105. Beauchamp told the Sankey Commission that this would have to be done if hours of work for breakers were reduced because carters were so few that they already had to work an hour longer than breakers, to ensure coal was cleared. The shortage of juvenile recruits is discussed more fully in chapters five and six.

106. Minute Books, SMA, BUL, December 6, 1919

107. Men were often threatened with dismissal and some actually sacked if they did not bring their sons to work in the pits. Beauchamp's SCL withdrew free coal from miner's widows if their sons did not enter the Company's employ. Young men who handed in their notice were frequently told they would have to take their fathers or other family members with them if they left the mine.

Clearance was often held up unless the breakers would help what few boys there were to get the coal out. Over 500 boys aged fourteen to nineteen were employed in the coalfield in 1918. By 1944 there were fewer than fifty.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Consequently, young men who did join the industry between the wars were increasingly likely to find their progress to the higher status and pay of a breaker blocked by managements' determination to keep them working as carters. Moreover, growing numbers of 'one-man places' were introduced in all the pits, in which a breaker was contracted to take his own coal to the trams, which reduced potential output and earnings for a man on piece rates. It was, however, the widespread practise of moving breakers onto carting work that provoked the most resentment. The Ludlows Lodge Committee 'definitely decided to stop this sort of thing going on'⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ but there was little they could do to safeguard the position of the coal breakers. Not only did an enforced move down the hierarchy to carting often entail a reduction in earnings but it was also an affront to a breakers' dignity to have to revert to 'boys work.' It should also be borne in mind that carting with a guss and crook in the cramped confines of a typical Somerset coalface was likely to be physically more arduous and difficult for a mature man than it was for an agile adolescent. In 1927, when there were 480 carting boys under the age of twenty at work in the coalfield, there were another 300 to 400 carters over that age employed, many of them more than forty years old.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

108. Kemp and Wilson, 'Social Ecology of the Radstock Coalfield.'

109. Minute Books, Ludlows Lodge Committee (SMA archive, BUL), May 14, 1938.

110. Report of the Guss Committee, CMD 3200 (1929), p. 10

Changing circumstances were reflected in changing terminology: "carting boy" was largely superseded by "carting chap" and eventually the term "carter" became the norm.

By the late 1930s demand for coal was rising and the shortage of labour in the Somerset mines had become a general problem. This made it marginally easier for breakers to resist attempts to move them to carting, as the following example illustrates. A miner at Ludlows, Harry Young, had worked as a breaker for ten years but went carting ('partly to oblige') for one shift in October 1938. When he was ordered to do the same the next day, he refused and was told to get his cards. The union representative was able to persuade the manager to keep the miner on as a breaker but Harry Young kept his job only on condition that in the interests of pit discipline he first complied with the order and did a day's carting. (111)

Pit discipline was another contentious issue in the mines. There is no evidence from either coalfield of miners being prosecuted for breaking safety rules or other regulations prescribed under the various Mining Industry Acts but summary dismissal for what were regarded as serious offences and suspension or fining for lesser ones were commonplace. It was, however, not unusual for a suspended Lothian miner to find work in another colliery and fail to return to the company that had 'punished' him by imposing a temporary lay-off. In Somerset it was more difficult to find another job. Insolence was punished most severely and was a misdemeanour for which a written apology was usually demanded.

111. Minute Books, Ludlows Lodge Committee (SMA archive, BUL), November 4, 1938.

Thus, a man who 'cussed the boss' underground at Norton Hill in the late 1920s was immediately sent up to the manager, who fined him 2/6d. and demanded that a signed apology be posted in the wheelhouse. The miner refused to do both (but was willing to do one or the other) and was therefore sacked. He was banned from employment in any other pit in the SCL group and, in effect, from the whole district. When he applied for work at Pensford he was initially offered a job but it was withdrawn when the manager discovered the circumstances in which he had left Norton Hill. (112) It has, moreover, been claimed by some men that the main cause for summary dismissal in Somerset between the wars was 'usually for answering back, though THEY called it, of course, "abusing your superiors" ' (113)

In the aftermath of the 1926 dispute the atmosphere in pits throughout the country became generally more authoritarian and repressive. What is more, the history of the miners at national level between 1919 and at least the mid 1930s was one of industrial defeat, falling wage levels, mounting unemployment and extensive short-time working. Not surprisingly, on the eve of the second World War deeply-entrenched grievances over conditions and especially over wage rates were characteristic of the mining workforce as a whole. Yet the regional diversity of the industry was such that miners' attitudes to pit work were fundamentally shaped by their immediate experiences in the collieries. Key differences in scale, method and organisation made work more

112. Stanley Chivers, Midsomer Norton. The anecdote relates to his brother Harry and the event took place in the late 1920s, according to Mr. Chivers.

113. Quotation from Bath CHE tapes, see f.n.84, p.50.

impersonal in the Lothians than it was in Somerset but it was the processes of change underway in the two coalfields that account for changing opinions about mining as an occupation.

Given the attitudes to mechanisation discussed above, the intensification of mechanisation in the Lothians could have made the industry more attractive to potential recruits while adding to the interest of the job for men already in the pits. For the miners who equated the introduction of machinery with the acquisition of new skills, the inter-war experience might well have increased their sense of self-respect. Furthermore, the emergence of the pooling system (however limited ⁽¹¹⁴⁾) entailed a more collective approach to work, which encouraged solidarity and a collective rise in self-esteem as the hated contractors were virtually eliminated in some pits. The miner's autonomy was extended to choosing his own workmates and although the pace of work was determined primarily by the pace of the machinery the members of a pool could, nonetheless, reach a consensus about norms of effort and thereby exert a limited degree of control over output. Another key factor in the Lothians was that there was no sharp decline in numbers employed in mining ⁽¹¹⁵⁾ and overtime rather than short-time was characteristic of the period. Fears about job security in the industry were therefore less extensive than they were in many coalfields and the tradition of occupational inheritance was only slightly modified in the years between 1919 and 1939.

114. See f.n.80, p.95.

115. See Table II:IV, p.86.

In Somerset on the other hand, an absolute decline in employment in mining of over 50 per cent was accompanied by a growing tendency for companies to sack older men as soon as their physical strength declined and also to turn men away from the pits at the first sign of ill health. This policy in an industry - and in a coalfield - where the health hazards of the occupation were particularly great added to the general insecurity of the miners and was a positive disincentive to recruitment. Moreover, the status of the breakers (never very secure in Somerset) was under constant attack. The autonomy of the face workers was reduced in terms of control over earnings related to output, of the composition of primary work groups and of the breakers' right to retain the place assigned to him. The piece-rate system persisted but more and more breakers were reduced to the ranks of day-wage labourers, paid by time. In the late 1930s the state of the labour market made it possible for some of the men to insist on working with mates of their own choosing and young men were on occasion able to defend the jobs of their elderly fathers⁽¹¹⁶⁾. In general, though, the composition of a company was increasingly likely to be decided by managers or other officials. The direction of labour underground became altogether more tightly-controlled. Men were moved frequently from their customary places, often to work for which they had not contracted. A growing number of single contracts were introduced, whereby a breaker had to haul his own coal. Young carters found their upward mobility blocked by the shortage of new entrants whereas many breakers were downgraded, in pay and status, to carting work.

116. R. Jones, Down Memory Lane, Midsomer Norton (privately printed, 1984), p.p. 51-2.

The cumulative effect of all this was considerably to erode the miners' traditional pride in their occupation and by the end of the inter-war period the dwindling workforce in Somerset was in many ways a deeply demoralised one.

Changes, and the response to change, in the mines of the two coalfields seem likely therefore to have had a positive influence on attitudes to pit work in the Lothians but a negative one in Somerset. Yet opposition to pit work was evidently strong in the Lothians by the 1940s (as recorded in the Social Surveys), while in Somerset antipathy was expressed in the fall-off of juvenile recruits and in the eagerness of adult miners to leave the industry. What happened in the pits was not the only influence nor, perhaps, the main one. Attitudes were also shaped by events and experiences beyond the workplace. The mining communities are therefore the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Three

The Mining Communities

The stereotype of the miners as an "isolated mass" living in geographically remote single-industry communities has been a dominant image in much of the historiography of mining and in numerous sociological studies of this occupational group.⁽¹⁾ Although the stereotype has been modified in recent years, the argument that class consciousness developed out of the interaction between work-based solidarities and the specific characteristics of mining communities has retained some validity.⁽²⁾ Nonetheless, as the "isolated mass" theory has come under critical attack, it has increasingly been realised that the mass conditions of mining do not always produce industrial militancy, political radicalism or a "true" class consciousness.⁽³⁾

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1. Jevons, British Coal Trade, chapter XX1, 'Miners' life and work', p.p.608-36 and chapter XX11, 'The Housing of Miners', p.p 637-59; F. Zweig, Men in the Pits (1948), p.p 144-45; S. Chaplin, 'Durham Mining Villages' in M. Bulmer (ed.) Mining and Social Change, p.p.59-82; Denis et.al., Coal is Our Life. See also J. Mac Farlane, 'Denaby Main: a South Yorkshire Mining Village' in J. Benson and R. Neville (eds.) Studies in the Yorkshire Coal Industry (Manchester, 1976), p.p 141-44. For a critical survey of some sociological surveys (including Dennis et.al., op.cit.) see C. Bell and H. Newby, Community Studies, p.p 165-71.
 2. J. Field, 'Essays in Review', Bulletin SSLH Vol. 51, No 1 (1986), p.p 51-4; E.D Weitz, 'Class Formation and Labour Protest in the Mining Communities of Southern Illinois and the Ruhr, 1890-1925', Labour History, Vol. 27, No.1 (Winter, 1985), p.p 85-105.
 3. Bulmer, 'Sociological Models of the Mining Community', Sociological Review, 23 (1975), p.p 61-89. A.B. Campbell has suggested that the term 'mining settlement' might be preferable to 'mining community', as being more neutral. See also David Crew, 'Class and Community. Local Research on Working Class History in Four Countries', in K.Tenfelde (ed.) Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in Vergleich (Munich, 1986), (not read).

Recognition of this fact is reflected in the trend of the recent historiography, towards detailed explorations of relationships in the community as a means of analysing and explaining variations in the strength of trade unionism and regional differences in the social and political consciousness of the miners.⁽⁴⁾

It is however widely acknowledged that there are demonstrable links between work, community and consciousness. Where the difficulty lies is in explaining the underlying process, not least because of the complexities of the relationship and the scope for interpretation from a variety of ideological approaches. Moreover, the concept of 'community' in itself raises specific difficulties.⁽⁵⁾ The term is used here both as a static, descriptive one and in a more abstract yet dynamic sense. Thus, the 'community' is defined primarily as the population of the geographical areas of the Somerset and Lothian coalfields but the term is extended to encompass the matrix of relationships and organisations within which the miners' social life was embedded. The relative stability and the structure of the mining communities in the two areas provide a base from which housing and health standards are considered, before a short section on family life. The chapter then moves on to religion, patterns of leisure and the provision of social amenities in the coalfields, with particular reference to the Miners' Welfare Scheme.

4. Waller, The Dukeries; Campbell, Lanarkshire Miners; J. Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness. Rebellion and Acquiescence in an Appalachian Valley (Oxford, 1980)

5. The concept is discussed in C.J. Calhoun, 'Community; towards a variable conceptualisation for comparative research', Social History, Vol. 5 (1980), p.p.105-29. See also D. Smith, 'Tonyandy 1910: Definitions of Community', Past and Present, Nos. 86-89 (1980), p.p 158-84.

The stage of development of the coal industry in the two regions was reflected in the relative stability of communities in Somerset and the Lothians. As we have seen, the industry expanded most rapidly in Somerset around the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century whereas in the Lothians the decades from 1890 to the first World War were a period of exceptional growth. Consequently, well before the beginning of the twentieth century, the Somerset coalfield had become an area of 'family' pits, around which there revolved a stable mining community.⁽⁶⁾ Despite the rapid inter-war erosion of the tradition of occupational inheritance, the shrinking mining labour force still consisted of a substantial core of long-established families which had been dependent on the collieries for employment over decades and generations. Although the decline in employment in mining in the district between the wars was some 50 per cent, the Norton-Radstock area lost only 10 per cent of its population through out migration in the decade 1921-1931.⁽⁷⁾ Moreover, little immigration and much inter-marriage were characteristic features of the coalfield, as the persistence and frequency of distinctly local surnames reflects. The Lothian mining communities, in contrast, were at a stage of "settling down" in an intermediary phase between the 'cosmopolitan' era associated with expansion, and the stability that was marked in Somerset.

6. The definition is that of C. Storm-Clark, used as the opposite of 'cosmopolitan', which denotes the type of pit found in expanding areas where migrant labour from all parts of the country made up of the deficiencies of local labour. C. Storm-Clark, 'The Miners, 1870- 1970, a Test Case for Oral History ', Victorian Studies, 15 (1971-72), p.67. See Waller, The Dukeries p.p. 45-6 on the significance of the mixed regional origins of labour in the Dukeries.

7. Census Abstracts, (England and Wales), 1931, County Reports, Somerset.

By the 1920s there were second and third generations in the Lothian pits, the sons and grandsons of men at work in the mines in the 1890s, but because the industry in the area continued to expand there was a steady influx of migrants from the declining coalfields of Ayrshire and central Scotland. A survey of the Scottish mining communities in the 1940s showed that geographical mobility was particularly high among miners in the Lothians. Whereas in the Central and Ayrshire coalfields 84 per cent and 75 per cent respectively of miners interviewed had always worked in a single town or within twenty miles of it, only 61 per cent of Lothian miners had done so. Moreover, 24 per cent of the Lothian sample (more than in any other Scottish coalfield) had at some time lived and worked outside Scotland in England, the United States or other places.⁽⁸⁾ If there is any truth in the adage that travel broadens the mind, we may assume that the geographical mobility of the Lothian miner was a contributory factor to the generally progressive outlook of men in that coalfield compared to the conservatism of many Somerset men, living in stable communities in which a close association with agriculture fostered traditional attitudes.

The importance of agriculture as an alternative to mining in the rural districts of the Somerset coalfield - and in East Lothian in the 1920s - is evident from the occupational tables.

8. RG 23/72 (PRO). The Social Survey. Scottish Mining Communities. An inquiry made by the Social Survey for the department of Health for Scotland, the Clyde Valley Planning Advisory Committee and the Central and South - East Scotland Planning Advisory Committee (1944), p.14.

TABLE III:I

PERCENTAGE OF MEN AGE 12 AND OVER IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS
SOMERSET (1921), URBAN AND RURAL DISTRICTS OF THE COALFIELD

	Urban Districts			Rural Districts		
	Midsomer Norton	Radstock	Bath	Clutton	Frome	Shepton Mallet
Total Occupied	2,572	1,319	4,429	5,293	3,621	3,213
Agriculture	5.1	1.7	26.2	23.2	37.0	42.7
Mining and Quarrying	54.4	55.7	27.0	40.5	25.0	15.4
Textiles	-	0.07	0.06	0.03	0.10	0.06
Makers of Textile Goods & Dress	4.2	0.3	0.2	3.4	0.3	0.5
Transport	4.5	6.5	6.7	4.8	6.1	7.5
Paper Workers & Printers	0.2	0.3	1.1	0.3	0.2	0.03
Professional	3.1	1.6	2.1	1.7	1.6	1.8
Clerks, Typists & Draughtsmen	1.5	2.6	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.4

SOURCE: Census Abstracts [England and Wales], County Reports, Somerset (1921).

Although miners and quarrymen⁽⁹⁾ outnumbered agricultural workers in the urban districts of Somerset and in two of the four rural districts, agriculture was nonetheless the only major industry other than mining. Over a quarter (26 per cent) of

9. There were small quarries throughout the coalfield but numbers employed were probably relatively few in 1921. Road building programmes in the late 1920s and 1930s did, however, increase the demand for roadstone and in the latter decade there was considerable expansion of quarrying on Mendip.

TABLE III:II

PRINCIPAL OCCUPATIONS IN EAST LoTHIAN
OCCUPIED MALES AND FEMALES, 1921.

Occupation	Persons			% Total in Occupation		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
Agricultural Occupations	5,539	4,090	1,449	25.6	26.0	24.5
Mining & Quarrying	3,553	3,512	41	16.4	22.4	0.7
Personal Service	2,719	340	2,379	12.6	2.2	40.2
Commercial, excluding clerks	1,529	1,000	529	7.1	6.4	8.9
Public Admin. & Defence	1,215	1,134	81	5.6	7.2	1.4
Transport & Communications	1,136	1,067	69	5.3	6.8	1.2
Professional	844	443	401	3.9	2.8	6.8
Clerks (not Civil Service or Local Authority)	755	349	406	3.5	2.2	6.8
Workers in Stone etc., Builders	708	705	3	3.3	4.5	0.0
Metal Workers, other than Precious metals	556	553	3	2.6	3.5	0.0
All other Occupations	3,081	2,520	561	14.1	16.0	9.5
Total in Occupations	21,635	15,713	5,922	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: Census of Scotland Vol.1, Part 15 (1921),
Country of East Lothian.

occupied East Lothian men were employed in agriculture in 1921, while mining and quarrying accounted for 22.4 per cent. The greater dominance of mining in Midlothian is demonstrated by the figures, which show that over a third (36 per cent) of occupied males in that area in 1921 were employed in mining and quarrying. Nonetheless, here again agriculture (employing 11.6 per cent of all occupied males) stands out as the only specific category other than mining to account for more than 10 per cent of occupied males.

TABLE III:III

PRINCIPAL OCCUPATIONS IN MIDLOTHIAN (EXCLUDING EDINBURGH CITY),
OCCUPIED MALES & FEMALES, 1921.

Occupation	Persons			% Total in Occupation			Occupation	Persons			% Total in Occupation		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females		Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
Mining & Quarrying	10,409	10,288	121	27.9	36.0	1.4	Textile Workers	1,272	386	886	3.4	1.4	10.1
Agricultural Occupations	4,108	3,303	805	11.0	11.6	9.2	Professional	1,196	584	612	3.2	2.0	7.0
Personal Service	2,867	383	2,484	7.7	1.3	20.3	Stoneworkers, Builders, etc.	1,175	1,172	3	3.1	4.1	0.0
Commercial, excluding clerks	2,686	1,574	1,112	7.2	5.5	12.6	Public Admin. & Defence	926	844	82	2.5	3.0	0.9
Paper Makers, Printers, etc.	2,006	1,292	714	5.4	4.5	8.1	All other Occupations	5,499	4,536	963	14.6	15.8	11.0
Metal Workers, other than Precious metals	1,866	1,781	85	5.0	6.2	1.0	Total in Occupations	37,365	28,580	8,785	100.0	100.0	100.0
Transport & Communications	1,834	1,734	100	4.9	6.1	1.1							
Clerks (not Civil Service or Local Authority)	1,521	703	818	4.1	2.5	9.3							

SOURCE: Census of Scotland, Vol.1, Part 23 (1921), County of Midlothian.

By 1931 the percentage of occupied males employed in agriculture in the urban districts of Midsomer Norton and Radstock had risen slightly from 5.1 per cent to 5.6 per cent and from 1.7 per cent to 2.0 per cent respectively.

TABLE III:IV

PERCENTAGES OF MEN AGE 14 & OVER IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS,
SOMERSET (1931), URBAN & RURAL DISTRICTS OF THE COALFIELD

	Urban Districts			Rural Districts		
	Midsomer Norton	Radstock	Bath	Clutton	Frome	Shafton Mallet
Total non-occupied	2,633	1,265	4,444	5,140	3,542	3,132
Agricultural	5.6	2.0	24.6	25.1	34.8	40.7
Mining and Quarrying	38.2	42.7	14.7	26.1	20.8	13.7
Boot, Shoe & Clay makers	2.3	0.07	0.4	2.1	0.2	0.3
Paperworkers/Bookbinders	0.5	0.1	0.7	0.5	0.02	-
Printers & Photographers	2.0	0.3	0.3	2.1	0.08	0.2
Railway Transport Workers	1.4	3.0	0.7	0.6	1.2	2.2
Commercial & Financial	8.1	11.0	8.1	6.1	4.8	4.6
Professional	3.7	1.9	2.6	1.8	1.4	1.6
General Labourers	3.1	2.7	5.2	4.9	3.1	4.0
Unskilled workers in Factories, etc.	1.2	1.3	1.9	1.2	2.0	2.1

SOURCE: Census Abstracts (England and Wales), County Reports, Somerset (1931).

In three of the four rural districts the percentage employed on the land declined marginally over the decade but in Clutton RDC there was an increase of 1.9 per cent. In the county of Somerset as a whole the proportion of miners and quarrymen declined by 8.5 per cent in the decade 1921 to 1931 but in Midsomer Norton, Radstock and the rural districts of Bath and Clutton the fall was in the order of 12 per cent to 16 per cent. In the Lothian coalfield, compiling the figures for the two counties shows a decline in employment in mining and quarrying of some 2 per cent to 5 per cent in the same period.

TABLE III : V

PRINCIPAL OCCUPATIONS IN EAST LoTHIAN,
OCCUPIED MALES AND FEMALES, 1931

Occupation	Persons			% of Total Occupied		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
Agricultural Occupations	5,026	3,919	1,107	23.8	25.6	18.8
Mining & Quarrying	3,085	3,078	7	14.6	20.1	0.1
Personal Service	3,047	411	2,636	14.4	2.7	44.9
Commercial, excluding clerks	1,717	1,126	591	8.1	7.4	10.1
Transport & Communications	1,219	1,158	61	5.8	7.6	1.0
Other & Undefined workers	1,090	1,050	40	5.1	6.9	0.7
Workers in Stone, Builders, Bricklayers, etc.	930	930	-	4.4	6.1	-
Professional	866	456	410	4.1	3.0	7.0
Clerks, etc. incl. Civil Service & Local Authority	714	280	434	3.4	1.8	7.4
Metal Workers, other than Precious Metals	560	550	10	2.6	3.6	0.2
All other Occupations	2,905	2,328	577	13.7	15.2	9.8
Total Occupied	21,159	15,286	5,873	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: Census of Scotland, Vol. 1, Part 16 (1931), County of East Lothian

In East Lothian there were only minor changes, a fall of 0.4 per cent in agricultural and 2.3 per cent in the mining and quarrying category. The position of agriculture remained virtually unchanged in Midlothian (a 0.2 per cent fall over the years).

TABLE III : VI

**PRINCIPAL OCCUPATIONS IN MIDLOTHIAN COUNTY
(EXCLUDING EDINBURGH CITY), OCCUPIED MALES AND FEMALES 1931**

Occupation	Persons			% of Total in Occupation		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
Mining & Quarrying	9,198	9,169	29	24.0	31.2	0.3
Agricultural Occupations	3,846	3,338	508	10.0	11.4	5.7
Personal Service	1,475	532	2,943	9.1	1.8	32.9
Commercial, excluding Clerks	3,376	2,047	1,329	8.8	7.0	14.8
Other & Undefined Workers	2,142	1,982	160	5.6	6.8	1.8
Metal Workers, other than Precious Metals	2,026	1,849	177	5.3	6.5	1.5
Transport & Communications	2,021	1,946	75	5.3	6.6	0.8
Clerks (not Civil Service or Local Authority)	1,778	791	987	4.6	2.7	11.0
Paper & Cardboard Bookbinders	1,773	1,122	651	4.6	3.8	7.3
Stoneworkers, Builders, etc.	1,349	1,349	-	3.5	4.6	-
Professional	1,218	631	587	3.2	2.1	6.5
Textile Workers	1,055	256	799	2.8	0.9	8.9
Stationary Engine Drivers, Dynamo Motor Attendants	795	795	-	2.1	2.7	-
Workers in Wood & Furniture	709	701	8	1.8	2.4	0.1
Makers of Food, Drink & Tobacco	580	490	90	1.5	1.7	1.0
Makers of Textile Goods, Dress, Etc	531	217	314	1.4	0.7	3.5
All other Occupations	2,445	2,099	346	6.4	7.1	1.9
Total in Occupations	38,317	29,359	8,958	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: Census of Scotland, Vol. I, Part 22 (1931), County of Midlothian

The variety of employment available in the coalfields is not, however, fully reflected in the somewhat rigid classification of the census abstracts. The observation of a Somerset journalist in 1921 that 'the prosperous little town of Radstock is entirely dependent on coal, it has not a single other industry of note'(10) had some validity but a limited amount of work other than mining was available in breweries, the gas works, small engineering shops and the wagon building and repair works.

10. Somerset Standard, April 8, 1921.

Men also worked on the railways, in glove and rubber-tyre factories and at the aluminium smelting works. Nonetheless, the town was 'the capital of the coalfield', dominated by mining. Two collieries (Ludlows and Middle Pit) were actually right in the centre of Radstock, with two more (Clandown and Wellsway) only a little further removed. The main office of Somerset Collieries Ltd. was on the Ludlows' pit-head site, at the bottom of Frome Hill. Both the Somerset Miners' Association and the Frome Divisional Labour Party had their headquarters in Radstock. With its covered market, numerous pubs and chapels, a Working Mens Club and prominent Co-operative Society buildings, the town clustered around its two railway stations and their notorious level crossings and had many of the features so characteristic of a mining settlement, including row upon row of terraced cottages. Midsomer Norton was the commercial and financial centre for the coalfield and although boot and shoe factories and printing works existed there it was generally regarded as rather more 'genteel' than Radstock. Its residents included doctors and solicitors, bankers and businessmen. Louis Beauchamp lived on the outskirts, at Norton Hall, and the manager of SCL's Norton Hill colliery occupied a large house in the High Street.

The Thatchers (related by marriage to the Beauchamps) lived at Stones Cross in the town, in premises adjoining their brewery. 'It was all Beauchamps and Thatchers in them days'⁽¹¹⁾ and these families were prominent in the affairs of the Anglican church and in various charitable and community projects. In Radstock the class structure was more homogeneous, with 81.2 per cent of occupied males classified as 'operatives' in the 1931 census

11. Reg Jones, Memories of Midsomer Norton, p.24

compared to a range from 70.5 per cent to 76.9 per cent so classified in other urban and rural districts covering the coalfield.⁽¹²⁾ Nonetheless, the whole mining district was widely perceived as an entity, set apart from its rural surroundings by the presence of the mines and the culture of the colliers:

the area [was] quite unlike any other part of Somerset. The political outlook of the people, since they were in the main industrial workers, tended to be left of centre. Besides, the coalminers of Somerset, like those in nearby Kingswood, were greatly influenced by the Methodist revival. So my district was predominately Nonconformist and Radical.⁽¹³⁾

In the Lothians, as in Somerset, some degree of occupational variety existed in what were essentially "mining communities". Commercial fishing was carried on in the Firth of Forth out of Prestonpans, on a small scale, while a minority of people found employment in other local industries. There were clay works, salt works and a chemical and vitriol factory in the town, as well as the Mellis soap factory and Fowler's brewery - which expanded in the inter-war period as demand grew for its famous 'Wee Heavy' bottled beer. Willie Colquhoun, who started work at Prestonlinks mine in 1917 at the age of thirteen, commented in the 1960s that 'this town used to be cosmopolitan, when it had its brewery, as well as the mines and other industries'.⁽¹⁴⁾

12. Census Abstracts, Somerset, 1931.

13. Sir Ronald Gould, Chalk Up the Memory (Birmingham, 1976) p.10. Ronald Gould was the son of the boot and shoe worker Fred Gould, who became the first Labour M.P. for Frome in 1923. After winning a scholarship to Shepton Mallet grammar school, Ronald Gould later trained as a teacher at a Methodist college in London but he returned to the coalfield as soon as he was qualified and taught in local schools for the rest of the inter-war period. Active in Labour politics, local government and trade unionism, he left the district in 1939 to take up a full-time union post and later became President of the National Union of Teachers.

14. The Haddington Courier, March 6, 1964.

Yet Prestonpans (like Tranent, in East Lothian) was a working-class town. Shop keepers and their assistants, a few clerks or other office workers, represented the lower middle class in such places but coal owners, colliery managers and the professional middle classes were conspicuous by their absence. At the other extreme, the general manager of the Lothian Coal Company, pit managers and other colliery officials were ever-present in the tightly controlled company town of Newtongrange. Miners living in Musselburgh, Dalkeith, Haddington or Edinburgh were likely to live in occupationally mixed but socially homogenous districts, in circumstances that had the potential for weakening work-derived solidarities but also for encouraging a broader class consciousness.

The miners in Somerset, however, were more closely associated with land workers than most industrial groups were by the twentieth century. Miners had a higher status and pit work was generally regarded as a high-wage occupation but the frequency of short-time working in the coalfield meant that miners' earnings were often less than the 45/- to 50/- of a full week and therefore not substantially more than 32/- to 35/- that an agricultural labourer might earn in the mid 1930s. Moreover, the overwhelming weight of evidence suggests that the majority of men had some experience of working on the land. Fred Swift, the SMA agent, was not unusual in having worked as a shepherd boy before going into the pits. Nor was Fred Parfitt, of Clutton, who began work on a farm and was employed on Lord Warwick's estates for two periods during his fifty years or so as a miner.

As well as often starting work as farm boys, many miners had worked on the land on a part-time basis as schoolboys and some continued to work on a casual, seasonal basis after moving into the mining industry. In the early part of the period there were still miners working regularly on the land after doing their shift in the pit, a practice that the SMA condemned in February 1919.⁽¹⁵⁾ Protests to the MFGB from the agricultural labourers' union brought pressure to bear on the SMA from Bob Smillie and the Federation executive, which prompted the union to issue a circular to its members in the hope that 'moral persuasion' would make the miners realise that their actions could undermine organisation among the agricultural workers.⁽¹⁶⁾ The SMA's task was to erode a long tradition, because the two industries had operated with what was to some extent a shared or interchangeable workforce for centuries. Moral persuasion had little effect and in March 1920 a radical member of the executive moved in council that the district be balloted on the question of strike action to prevent miners 'moonlighting' on the land. The resolution was carried by 14:4. The members voted 3097:952 in favour of a strike⁽¹⁷⁾ but the executive ruled against it, partly because the ballot was deemed unsatisfactory (as only two thirds of the members voted⁽¹⁸⁾) but also because the proposed action did not seem likely, on reflection, to influence the farmers.

15. Minute Books, SMA (BUL), February 17, 1919.

16. *ibid.*, June 4, 1919.

17. *ibid.*, August 29.

18. The low vote was partly accounted for by the managements' refusal to allow a ballot at Writhlington and Kilmersdon because the issue did not relate to work in the Company's pits.

It was decided that any future complaints should be dealt with jointly by the SMA agent and a farm workers' representative, who were to deal directly with the farmer concerned.⁽¹⁹⁾ The agricultural labourers' union did not object to miners working at trade union rates on a casual or seasonal basis but during the summer of 1920 there were reports of miners haymaking for as little as 4d. or 6d. an hour.⁽²⁰⁾ Appeals to these men from the SMA to 'be loyal to the agricultural labourer and not to do anything to hurt him in any way'⁽²¹⁾ may have persuaded some to demand the union rate but the practice continued throughout the period, albeit slightly less so after legislation on social welfare made it possible for a miner working only three days or less to claim some unemployment benefit.

There were labour activists among the miners who had attitudes of almost missionary zeal towards organising and politicising the farm workers but the occupation was not looked down upon in Somerset as it was in parts of the Lothians, nor was the agricultural labourer regarded with the suspicion reflected in a Lothian miner's comment that strike breakers were 'always men off

19. Minute Books, SMA (BUL), March 31, 1920.

20. *ibid.*, May 19, 1920.

21. *ibid.*, July 28, 1920.

the land, or the Irish'.⁽²²⁾ In rural East Lothian (where agriculture accounted for 26.0 per cent of occupied males in 1921 and for 24.5 per cent of women)⁽²³⁾ some miners may have worked casually on the land, especially at harvest time in this area of cereal-farming and market gardening, but agriculture was particularly important as a source of employment for women. Almost a quarter of women working in East Lothian were in this category in 1921, and just under 20 per cent were thus employed in 1931 (see Tables III:II and III:IV). In the early post first World War years, turnip and potato fields still lay around Prestonpans but it was women and children who worked on the land. It was a despised occupation (probably, in part, because it was "womens work") and miners recall that only women from the poorest families, or the widowed or deserted, habitually did such work. Domestic service was still the main area of employment for women in the Lothians.

22. Seasonal migration from Ireland to Scotland for harvest work continued in the 1920s and 1930s. Bye-laws regulating the accommodation for migrant labour on farms and fruit farms in East Lothian and Midlothian were confirmed by the Scottish Health Board in 1922. Fourth Annual Report of the Scottish Board of Health, Cmd 1887 (1922).

23. Table III:II, p.117.

The percentage of occupied females in the personal service category of the census rose in East Lothian from 40.2 per cent in 1921 to 44.9 per cent in 1931, while in Midlothian there was an increase from 28.3 per cent to 32.9 per cent, a rise that almost certainly reflected the pressures that pushed women back into domestic service after the war-time experience of a wider range of occupations.⁽²⁴⁾ Mining itself offered few opportunities to women seeking work in their neighbourhood. In Somerset women were only employed in clerical jobs and in both coalfields women were numerically insignificant in the total number of clerks and salaried persons employed above ground.

TABLE III:VII
CLERKS AND SALARIED PERSONS IN THE SOMERSET & LOTHIAN COAL
INDUSTRY, CLASSIFIED BY GENDER, 1925-1938

Year	SOMERSET		THE LOTHIANS	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1924	106	6	291	37
1925	116	7	245	32
1926	103	5	224	32
1927	105	4	223	31
1928	109	3	221	30
1929	105	2	219	30
1930	107	2	218	31
1931	93	2	211	25
1932	87	2	207	31
1933	85	2	214	28
1934	81	2	207	28
1935	80	2	196	29
1936	89	2	190	27
1937	92	2	201	31
1938	91	3	208	29

SOURCE: Statistical Table, Annual Reports of the Mines Inspectorate, 1924-1938.

NOTE: Only in 1924 and thereafter were clerks and salaried persons counted and recorded as a separate category of surface workers.

24. For some evidence of women's attitudes to domestic work at the end of the first World War and of official concern over their reluctance to return to the occupation see the Interim Report of the Inquiry into the Scheme of the Out of Work Donation, Cmd. 196 (1919). See also G.Braybon and P.Summerfield, Out of the Cage. Women's Experiences in Two World Wars (1987), chapter 7, 'Demolisation, 1918-20', p.p.115-132.

Women worked on the surface in the Lothians (mainly screening and washing coal) but they were few in number and the total employed declined sharply from just under 200 in 1921 to less than fifty by 1938.

TABLE III:VIII
FEMALE WAGE-EARNERS EMPLOYED IN THE LOTHIAN COAL INDUSTRY,
CLASSIFIED BY AGE, 1921-1938

YEAR	UNDER 16	16 AND OVER	TOTAL
1921	11	187	198
1922	22	148	170
1923	30	143	173
1924	39	117	156
1925	33	104	137
1926	16	73	89
1927	16	59	75
1928	6	42	48
1929	12	38	50
1930	5	33	38
1931	5	32	37
1932	2	32	37
1933	1	26	27
1934	7	21	28
1935	14	29	43
1936	15	37	52
1937	8	35	43
1938	6	39	45

NOTE: Figures for 1921, 1922, 1923 include female clerks and salaried persons. See note to Table III:VII, p.127.

The dominance and persistence of domestic work is demonstrated by the work experience of 1,451 housewives interviewed in the Scottish coalfields in the 1940s.⁽²⁵⁾ The bulk of the sample were in the age group from twenty to fifty nine and 36 per cent had last worked in paid employment as domestic servants. Only 5 per cent gave their last occupation as 'pit worker' whereas 15 per cent had worked in factories and 10 per cent had been 'unoccupied/at home'.⁽²⁶⁾

25. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities (PRO), p.7.
26. *ibid.*, p.18.

TABLE III:IX

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AGE 12 AND OVER IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS,
SOMERSET (1921), URBAN AND RURAL DISTRICTS OF THE COALFIELD.

	Urban Districts			Rural Districts		
	Midsomer Norton	Radstock	Bath	Clutton	Frome	Shepton Mallet
Total Occupied	549	226	1,620	1,147	973	870
Agriculture	2.1	1.7	3.4	7.9	11.9	16.2
Textiles	0.3	2.6	0.1	0.1	1.4	0.9
Makers of Textile Goods & Dress	17.4	9.2	0.4	10.2	6.4	5.0
Paperworkers, Printers etc.	4.5	0.8	3.3	1.2	1.3	0.3
Clerks, Typists & Draughtswomen	4.9	11.0	3.8	4.0	2.1	1.7
Professional	11.2	11.5	10.0	11.5	10.1	11.2
Personal Service, including Domestic	41.5	43.8	59.7	49.4	54.8	52.1

SOURCE: Census abstracts, England & Wales, Somerset County 1921.

Domestic service was also the experience of most working women in Somerset. The figures show a slight decline in all rural and urban districts of the coalfield between 1921 and 1931, in a range from 0.8 per cent in Frome RDC to 10.7 per cent in Radstock UDC but the fall can be partly accounted for by different definitions and categories of labour being used in 1931.⁽²⁷⁾

27. 'Personal and domestic service' comprised a single category in 1921 but they were used as separate categories in the 1931 census returns for England and Wales.

TABLE III:X

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AGE 14 & OVER IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS,
SOMERSET (1931), URBAN & RURAL DISTRICTS OF THE COALFIELD.

	Urban Districts			Rural Districts		
	Midsomer Norton	Radstock	Bath	Clutton	Frome	Shepton Mallet
Total Occupied	613	211	1,652	1,220	825	729
Agricultural	1.4	-	1.9	5.0	6.4	10.8
Textile Workers	-	-	0.2	-	1.2	1.3
Makers of Textile Goods & Dress etc.	7.9	9.0	5.2	6.3	4.9	4.2
Paperworkers & Bookbinders	12.2	3.3	3.2	4.5	0.3	0.1
Printers & Photographers	1.3	0.4	0.3	1.7	0.2	-
Retail Shop Asst.	6.0	11.3	6.4	5.0	4.7	5.2
Midwives & Nurses	1.7	1.4	4.0	4.4	3.0	2.6
Teachers	6.3	14.6	4.1	7.5	6.7	8.2
Domestic Servants	40.9	33.1	52.1	45.6	54.0	51.0

SOURCE: Census abstracts (England and Wales), County Reports, Somerset (1931).

A lack of female employment was characteristic of many mining districts, particularly of rural coalfields such as Somerset. Only in the printing industry (located at Paulton and Midsomer Norton) was there any sizeable demand for female labour. Of a total labour force of 1,607 in the local printing industry in 1939, 714 were women. This feature was reflected by the fact that in the part of the coalfield covered by the Midsomer Norton employment exchange the proportion of females in the insured population in the 1940s was 21.21 per cent, whereas in Radstock it was only 5.64 per cent.⁽²⁸⁾ There were few opportunities for girls leaving school except domestic service, which often meant moving away from the area.⁽²⁹⁾ Although Radstock and Midsomer

28. HGL 71/1099 (PRO), Ministry of Town and Country Planning, South West Region. The Somerset Coalfield Area, Observations and Recommendations by the Regional Planning Officer on Housing in the Coalfield (1944), p.3

29. As in most rural coalfields, including the Forest of Dean, which had much in common with that of Somerset. For an account of life in the Gloucestershire mining communities between the wars see W. Foley, A Child in the Forest (Futura paperback, 1977).

Norton were locally important they did not serve as centres to a large population and consequently the proportion of workers employed in the distribution trades was below the national average. Similarly, there were fewer clerical and secretarial jobs than in larger towns and the coalfield had no share in the Somerset tourist industry, which employed a high proportion of women. The impact of migration, mainly to domestic service, affected the demographic structure of the population. Age group analysis indicated that in the 1930s there was an abnormally small proportion of females in the young adult age groups, although the proportion of girls aged fourteen and under was above the national average. Similarly, the ratio of males to females was normal among children but exceptionally high in the young adult age groups.(30)

As for married women, some certainly contributed to the family economy by taking in lodgers, going out "charring" or working in their homes as washerwomen, doing casual, episodic work which is notoriously under-recorded in official statistics. Nonetheless, personal testimony from both Somerset and the Lothians suggests that few women worked regularly in paid employment outside the home after marriage.(31) In 1931, in Somerset, it was only in Bath rural district that more than a quarter (28.0 per cent) of women aged fourteen and over were occupied.

30. HGL 71/ 1099, The Somerset Coalfield Area (PRO), p.3.

31. Recent historiography on the social history of women includes E. Roberts, A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940 (Oxford,1984); A.John ed., Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918 (Oxford,1986); J. Lewis (ed.) Labour and Love. Woman's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940 (Oxford,1986). For a contemporary account of womens' lives in the 1930s, see M.Spring Rice, Working Class Wives (1939) (Virago paperback edition,1981).

TABLE III:XI

FEMALE POPULATION & OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE, SOMERSET (1931),
URBAN & RURAL DISTRICTS OF THE COALFIELD.

	Urban Districts			Rural Districts		
	Midsomer Norton	Radstock	Bath	Clutton	Frome	Shepton Mallet
Total, all ages	3,703	1,753	7,398	7,739	5,260	4,658
Age 14 and over	2,821	1,315	5,885	5,882	4,094	3,615
Occupied (14 and over)	613	211	1,652	1,220	825	729
Operatives in work	532	165	1,407	1,006	663	580
Out of work (all classes)	35	29	85	87	56	50
Unoccupied/Retired (14 and over)	2,208	1,104	4,233	4,662	3,269	2,886

SOURCE: Census Abstracts [England and Wales], County Reports, Somerset (1931).

Proximity to the city of Bath may well have provided opportunities for young women in this district to live at home and commute to work. The female employment figure of 16.0 per cent for the Radstock urban district reflects the dominance of mining in the town and it is likely that the majority of the 211 females over fourteen recorded there as occupied were young, unmarried women. Not only did lack of opportunity and the weight of social convention restrict married women but the amount of domestic labour entailed in a mining household left many of them with little time for other work. With a husband and perhaps several sons in the pits, domestic routine was ruled by the demands of the mine and the shift system. Moreover, the housewife's duties were often made more onerous by poor housing and a lack of basic amenities.

Housing was a major issue in the inter-war years, a period that witnessed a considerable amount of house-building and significant changes in the provision of public sector housing. The comparative size of the privately rented market fell substantially while families living in rented council houses rose from around 1 per cent of all families in Great Britain in 1914 to some 14 per cent by 1939. Rising real incomes, a fall in labour costs and in the price of raw materials and (in the 1930s) the ready availability of mortgages at low rates of interest all helped to promote the growth of home ownership.⁽³²⁾

The post-war demand for better housing reflected the rising aspirations of the working classes and the 'Housing Question' was the subject of many speeches and lectures in the coalfields in the years 1919 to 1923 or so. Labour candidates in district elections in Somerset in 1919 pledged themselves to 'give our immediate and earnest attention to the development of such a

32. See S.Constantine, Social Conditions in Britain, 1918-39 (Lancaster University Pamphlets, 1983), p.p.23-32, 'Housing' for a brief survey of housing conditions. For working class housing see J.D. Chapman, (ed), The History of Working Class Housing. A Symposium (Newton Abbot, 1971). Housing in the mining communities, see C.P.Griffin, 'Three Generations of Miners' Housing at Moira. Leicestershire 1811-1934', Industrial Architecture Review, Vol.1, 3 (1977), p.p.276-282; E.Rhodes, 'The Development and Design of Miners' Housing, 1750-1939, with special reference to coal production', Ph. D. thesis, Nottingham University, 1983; Ayrshire Miners Rows 1913, facsimile of evidence submitted to R.C. on Housing (Scotland), Ayrshire Archaeological and National History Society publication, Ayrshire Collections, Vol. 13, No. One (1979).

scheme that will provide a convenient dwelling house at such a rent as a working man can afford to pay'.⁽³³⁾ In all the coalfields, the practice adopted by colliery companies in the early years of the industry of providing houses for their workmen practically ceased after 1925.⁽³⁴⁾ Between 1918 and 1925 no colliery housing was built in Somerset, while Lothian coal companies erected 285 houses.⁽³⁵⁾ A.S.Cunningham suggested that company housing became increasingly commonplace in the Lothians in a fifty-year period from around 1870, as the success of the co-operative societies drove out many small traders who had tended to invest their savings in property for letting.⁽³⁶⁾ This was not the case in Somerset where Radstock Co-operative Society was an agency that assisted home ownership through mortgages to its members (as the SMA did in the 1890s) and, furthermore, built houses to let in various parts of the coalfield.

In general, home-ownership was a feature of high wage districts but whereas company housing was characteristic of the Lothians it seems that many miners in the low-wage Somerset coalfield were home owners. Beauchamp described housing in the small coalfields of South West England as 'good' and went on to tell the Sankey Commission in 1919 that 'large numbers of these houses in

33. Somerset Guardian, April 4, 1919.

34. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), p.67. The Dukeries were a notable exception, see Waller, op. cit.

35. Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, 1925, Vol.I, CMD 2600 XIV (1926), Minutes of Evidence, Parts I and II (non-parliamentary), appendices and misc. section, Table 37:I, p.249; Table 37: IV, p.249.

36. Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, p.86.

Somerset and nearly 50 per cent in the Forest of Dean are owned by the miners themselves'. Furthermore, he suggested that

'the fact that a large number have been able to build their own houses and buy little bits of land....seems to show that some of them are fairly comfortably off'.⁽³⁷⁾

War-time improvements in their economic position together with deeply-ingrained habits of thrift may have boosted miners' savings in the years prior to 1919-1920, before circumstances provided an opportunity for more families to become owner-occupiers. New houses, built by private enterprise, were frequently advertised for sale in the Somerset Guardian in 1919 - 1921 at prices from £190 to just over £200 but the sale of several landed estates was perhaps of more significance. Small lots of one house and garden were a feature of the sale of the Radstock portion of the Waldegrave's estates in the immediate post-war years and many tenants purchased their previously rented cottages. Lord Warwick also disposed of some of his property, including forty-six houses at Maynards Terrace, Clutton, and the squire of Pensford put a whole village on the market, many of the cottages being bought for £20 to £30 apiece by the villagers.⁽³⁸⁾ The local growth in home-ownership was commented on by the prospective Labour candidate for the Frome constituency, at the 1920 May Day rally in the coalfield. Urging support for nationalisation as the only way to defend war-time wage gains, Captain Gill said that many men in the district had put their savings into their homes and either owned their houses outright

37. R.C. on the Coal Industry, Cmd 2600 XIV (1926), p.p. 894-97.
38. HGL 71/1099, The Somerset Coalfield Area, (PRO)p.16.

or had 'partly acquired' them. The life-savings of many miners 'were locked up in the locality'.⁽³⁹⁾

Working-class housing in Scotland was in general worse than in many other parts of Britain and although there was some overall improvement between 1919 and 1936, standards remained comparatively low. The one-apartment house, condemned wholesale by an official inquiry into housing in 1917,⁽⁴⁰⁾ was similarly condemned in the early 1930s as a 'menace to the public health, common decency and the morality of the country'.⁽⁴¹⁾ The Royal Commission which investigated the condition of working class housing in Scotland between 1912 and 1917 devoted an entire chapter of its final report to 'Miners Housing in Scotland'⁽⁴²⁾ but it took no evidence from the Lothians, which supports the claim of Robert Brown (secretary of MELMA and a member of the Royal Commission) that housing in the Lothian coalfield was above the average for mining districts. Brown cited Newtongrange, built by the Lothian Coal Company, as the best company housing in Scotland.⁽⁴³⁾ Newtongrange was a semi-rural mining community with a population of 957 in 1891 but with the sinking of Lady Victoria colliery it was rapidly expanded into an urban new town. By 1901 its population was 2,406, rising to 6,500 by 1925. Between 1910 and 1925 the company built 318 houses to add to the

39. Somerset Guardian, May 7, 1920.

40. Royal Commission On Working Class Housing in Scotland, 1912-17, CD 8731 (1917).

41. Report, Departmental Committee (Scotland) on Housing (Edinburgh, 1933-34), Cmd 4469, p.p.11-12.

42. Report, R.C. on Working Class Housing, Scotland, p.p. 90-100.

43. Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, p.86.

414 erected between 1896 and 1906.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Power relationships were not as explicitly spelled out in areas of company housing in the Lothians as they were in the development of some mining towns.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Lady Victoria pit was named after Lord Lothian's wife but the grid pattern of streets at Newtongrange were merely numbered: First Avenue, Second Avenue and so forth. Similarly, Edinburgh Collieries Ltd. owned 704 houses (situated chiefly in Tranent, Wallyford and Prestonpans),⁽⁴⁶⁾ 186 of them on the twenty-acre site at Prestonpans where the company created a 'garden city' in the early 1920s. 'Nimmo Avenue' there was named after the chairman of Edinburgh Collieries (Adam Nimmo) and in the settlement developed by Summerlee Iron Company at Cuthill (on the eastern edge of Prestonpans) there was a 'Summerlee Road'. The other three roadways in Cuthill were prosaically named Front Street, Middle Street and Back Street. Moreover, except in Newtongrange and the model villages of Roslin and Whitehall - all owned by the Lothian Coal Company - employer hegemony was not absolute in those mining settlements where company housing was the norm. In Prestonpans, for example, Edinburgh Collieries owned much of the housing and was a major employer of labour at its Prestonlinks colliery but it was rivalled in both spheres by the owners of Prestongrange colliery, the Summerlee Iron Company. Nonetheless, the possibility or threat of eviction was a powerful

44. Information on Newtongrange is taken partly from Cunningham, op.cit., Chapter XII, 'The Towns and Villages of Today' supplemented with material from unsorted papers of the Lothian Coal Company held at the Scottish Mining Museum, Newtongrange, Midlothian. The archive was in the early stages of being catalogued in summer 1986. The Museum has produced a few occasional papers on the development of Newtongrange and these were made available in typescript.

45. Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness, passim.

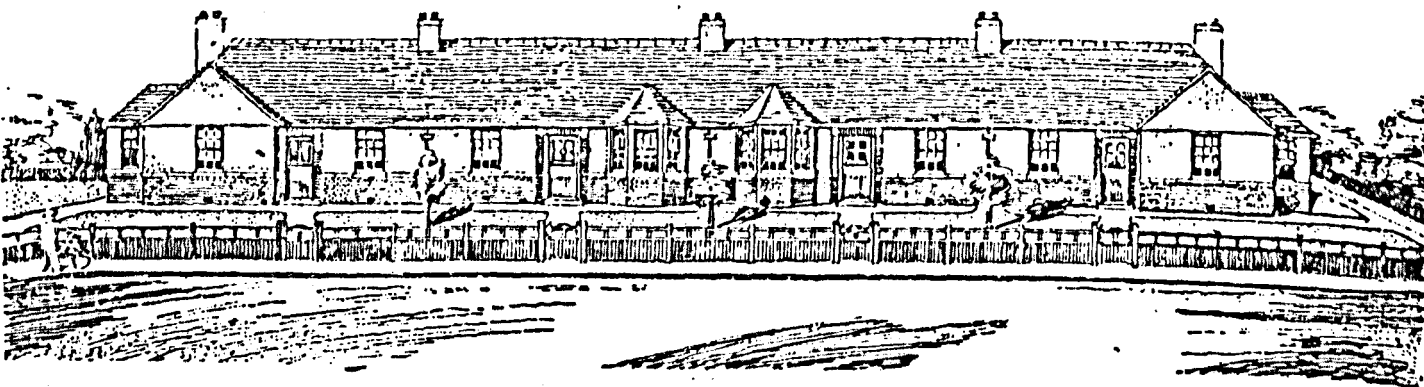
46. Report, Scottish Coalfields Commission (PRO)

instrument of control in mining communities and the threat was carried through on occasions, as James Bush recalls. His father was falsely accused of stealing from a colliery, Bush claims, to provide an excuse to get rid of him after his active part in the 1926 dispute and a continuing reputation for being 'troublesome' to management. The Bush family of nine were evicted onto the streets of Elphinstone one evening in 1929, the house immediately boarded up to prevent re-entry. A neighbour took the family in but next day a colliery official called to warn that anyone harbouring the Bushes was also likely to be evicted.⁽⁴⁷⁾ However, most threatened evictions dealt with by the Lothian union between the wars concerned cases of miners occupying houses after they had left a company's employ or where a company wanted possession of a house lived in by the widow of a miner. None of these few cases ended in eviction and by the end of the period various Rent Restrictions Acts contained clauses that made it more difficult for coal companies to repossess houses in such circumstances even through legal means such as court orders.⁽⁴⁸⁾

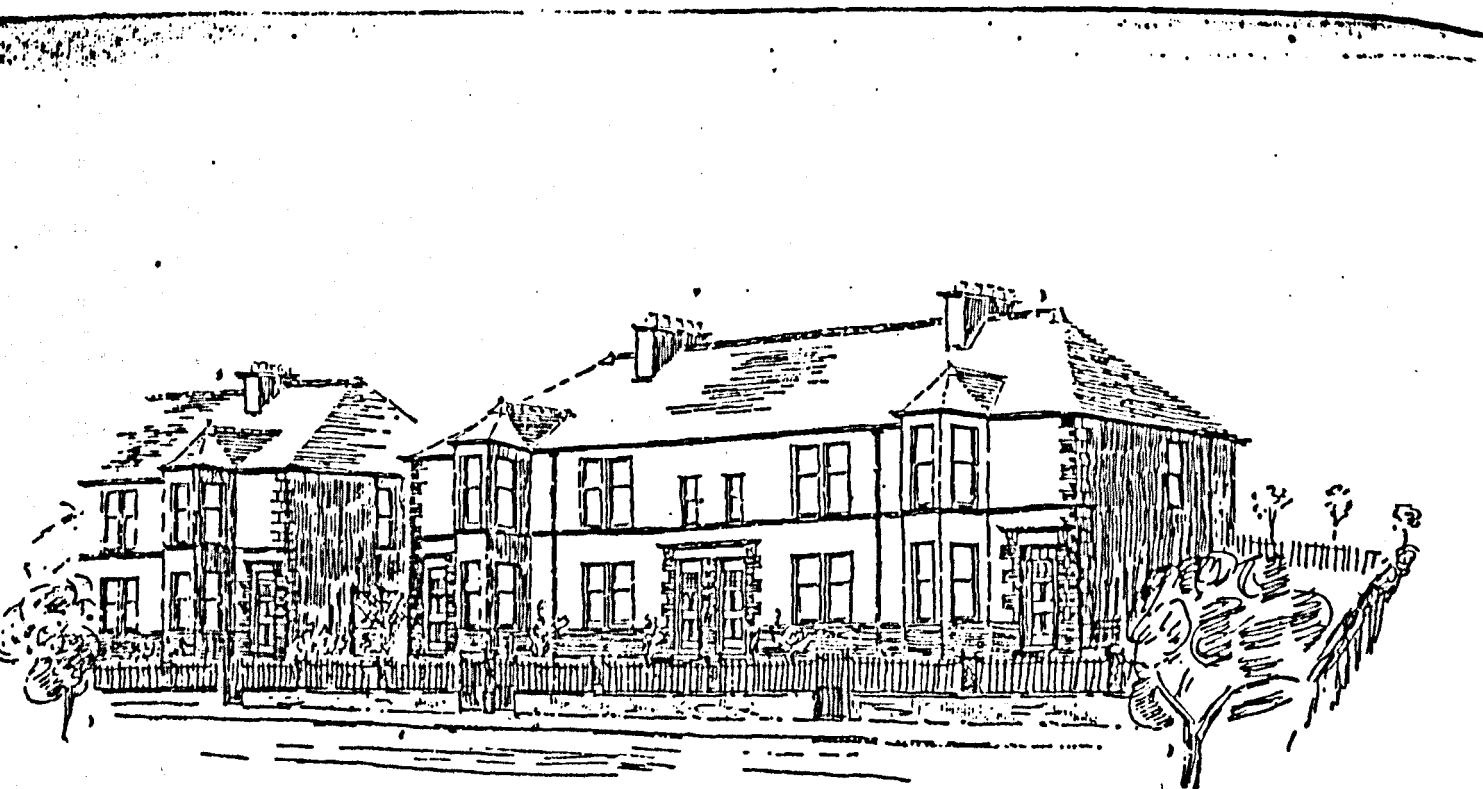
The substantial investment in housing by the coal companies was beneficial in raising living standards. Many hundreds of existing houses in the Lothian coalfields were improved in the early 1920s by the addition of sculleries, bathrooms and indoor flush-lavatories. Moreover, in the scheme launched around 1924 at an estimated cost of £400,000, these amenities became standard and the new houses were supplied with electricity or gas (sometimes

47. James Bush, Musselburgh Miners Welfare Institute, July 1986.

48. It was noted in the Regional Survey (Somerset and Bristol) that coal owners complained about the difficulty of getting possession orders on company houses occupied by non-miners or men working for other companies.



A block of four miners' houses at Prestonpans Garden City.



Houses for colliery officials at Tranent, East Lothian.

both), generated or manufactured by the coal companies. Social hierarchy was maintained, by housing colliery officials in two-storied dwellings with four or five rooms while miners' cottages (usually built in blocks of two, four or six rather than the traditional "miners rows" of the nineteenth century) were often on one floor and had only two or three rooms.

The basic amenities enjoyed by most miners' families in the Lothians by the end of the 1920s were almost unknown in Somerset in 1939, except to those who moved into local authority housing between the wars. An investigation into housing in the coalfield carried out in 1944 urged improvements in public utility supplies and sewage systems but concluded that although unsatisfactory conditions existed housing was not a problem comparable to that which existed in many larger mining areas. Two examples must suffice to give some indication of housing in a coalfield where no major problem officially existed. In the industrial village of Paulton there was a closely - compacted group of miners' houses known as 'New Town', all of which had been condemned as unfit for habitation although they were structurally in good condition but were officially considered to fall below contemporary standards of space and accommodation. Water, gas and electricity were available at the site but had never been connected. Stand pipes, earth closets, oil lamps and an open range for heating water and for cooking were therefore the norm. Representative of miners housing in more rural areas was Fairfield Cottages at Peasedown, in the Bathavon rural district. Peasedown was notorious throughout the inter-war period and beyond for its feeble water supply and lack of sanitation. As late as 1944 at Fairfield in Peasedown 'earth closets are used

and two standpipes do service for twenty houses - conditions which are usual in this village.' (49)

Most miners had little choice over housing. For many Lothian miners the place of work determined the place of residence, in a company - owned house. In Somerset not all miners, probably only a substantial minority, could afford to build or buy their own homes. Working people increasingly looked to the state to provide decent housing at affordable rents, particularly after Lloyd Georges' extravagant promises to build homes fit for heroes as the first World War ended. The promise seemed likely to fulfill its potential when Addison's Housing Act was passed in 1919, giving local authorities financial subsidies for housing from central government and requiring them to build houses to rent to working-class families. Labour took control of Radstock and Midsomer Norton district councils in the local elections of 1919 and in the face of considerable opposition pushed ahead with ambitious housing schemes but Clutton RDC was slow to take action. The farming and land-owning interest was strongly represented on Clutton council and there were complaints from

49. HGL 71/1099, The Somerset Coalfield Area (PRO), p.19. The housing conditions noted in this report were not exceptional in Somerset or elsewhere in 1941 and reports in the Somerset Guardian reveal that similar conditions persisted in many rural and semi-rural settlements in the county until at least the mid-1960s. Local authority housing built in the coalfield between the wars was generally of a higher standard (in terms of space and amenities) than the pre-existing housing stock. By 1944 most of the 'miners houses' at Newtown, Paulton, and many in Peasedown were occupied by war-time evacuees from the cities or other non-mining families. In his inquiry into life in the coalfields, published by the Left Book Club in 1948, Zweig found that in all the areas he visited council houses were 'better' (in terms of space and amenities) than others, whether colliery or privately owned. The standard of housing, he concluded, depended primarily on when it was built. F.Zweig, Men in the Pits (1948), p.p. 142-43.

some of its members about the unfairness of expecting 'agricultural parishes' to share the cost of housing schemes, when most of the development would be concentrated in mining villages. (51)

The Labour councillors in the urban districts were soon forced to recognise that being in power at local level meant very little, when housing policy overall was determined by central government and subsidies depended on local authorities complying with the demands of central government departments and officials. Moreover, the Addison Act was ^{restricted} in 1921 ^(51a) and although the principle of local authority housing for the working-classes was maintained in subsequent Acts, changes in the financial arrangements effectively destroyed any hopes of council housing providing homes of a high standard according to need. These changes made a considerable impact at local level. In 1919 to 1920, under pressure from Labour - controlled parish councils and Labour members of the district council, Bath RDC drew up plans for extensive housing schemes for the parishes of Wellow, Shoscombe, Peasedown St John and Camerton. The Housing Commission regarded the planned development as 'urgently required'. (52) However, before the building programme was underway, the Ministry of Housing turned down the scheme on the grounds of cost. The Council decided that for reasons of economy only eight houses could be built at Meadgate, Camerton, and that these must be of the non-parlour type.

51. After three months of procrastination, Clutton RDC prepared a scheme for 226 houses. Somerset Guardian January 31, 1919; April 4, 1919; June 20, 1919.

52. Somerset Guardian, October 28, 1921.

51a. As a result of the economy campaign of 1921, the number of grants was limited and Addison resigned from the Ministry. (141)

The decision outraged the Labour parish council, which considered houses of this kind 'unsuitable for families, lacking both comfort and privacy, bordering on indecency and savouring of slumdom'. If they were built, declared the councillors, they would 'stand as a monument of a public authority's ineptitude, who failed to interpret the spirit of the times and the great social need of the people'.⁽⁵³⁾ What is more, rents were fixed at the comparatively high level of 8/- to 10/- per week, which Fred Gregory (a miner and Labour councillor) argued took no account of the low wages in the district and would in all probability lead to 'constant trouble with arrears through tenants inability to pay, ending up with the disgusting spectacle of eviction'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Certainly, being rehoused in "better" accommodation was not always a happy experience for working class families. The council tenant was subject to petty rules and regulations in some ways comparable to those that governed life in a company town and, because of the hidden costs of moving and often higher rents, a family's overall living standard could well fall. This applied in company housing also, as the tenants of Store Road, Arniston found in 1925. When the Arniston Coal Company improved the houses by installing bathrooms and flush lavatories it raised rents from 9/- per fortnight to 15/- per fortnight. On the basis that the increase was likely to reduce household expenditure on food (a common response to rising rents), MELMA successfully negotiated with the Company to get rents fixed at a compromise figure of 13/6d. per fortnight but this still represented an increase of 50 per cent.⁽⁵⁵⁾

53. Somerset Guardian, February 18, 1921.

54. Somerset Guardian, March 10, 1922.

55. Labour Standard (Edinburgh), April 11, 1925.

As the national housing stock increased in the inter-war period there was a growing awareness that building programmes had not eradicated the slums. The Housing Acts of the 1930s were therefore concerned primarily with slum clearance. Returns of proposed clearances under the Act of 1930 included seventy-three houses in Radstock, involving 433 people or 11.9 per cent of the total population enumerated in the 1931 census. 114 houses were scheduled for demolition in Clutton rural district where an estimated 383 persons needed rehousing. (56)

The figures suggest that overcrowding in the mining communities of Somerset was not extensive. In the county as a whole only 1.6 per cent of overcrowded urban dwellings was in the Norton Radstock district. 19.4 per cent of condemned rural housing in the county was in the Clutton rural district but this arguably had less to do with the presence of mining than with the persistence of lower housing standards in rural areas, where fewer council houses were built between the wars. (57)

56. Housing Act (1930), Particulars of Slum Clearance Programmes Furnished by Local Authorities (1933-34), Cmd 4534, p.p. 9-12. For Scotland see Report, Departmental Committee on Housing (Scotland) Cmd 4397 (Edinburgh) 1933. The report contains no information on the Lothian coalfield area.

57. See f.n.49, p.140.

Returns made for a survey on overcrowding in Scotland in the mid

TABLE III:XII

SUMMARY OF THE OVERCROWDING SURVEY MADE UNDER THE HOUSING
(SCOTLAND) ACT, 1935*

Number of Houses Surveyed	Burghs	Number of Overcrowded Houses	Number of Overcrowded Families	Number of Overcrowded Houses belonging to Local Authorities
2 345	Bathgate	661	810	96
1 261	Bonnyrigg & Lasswade	225	243	50
8 890	Coatbridge	3885	4502	538
637	Cockenzie & Port Seton	136	136	31
1 692	Dalkeith	244	424	91
99 608	Edinburgh	17 101	20 244	3 136
257 421	Glasgow	74 952	82 109	8 179
1 133	Haddington	69	163	31
3 985	Musselburgh	1 032	1 256	220
610	Prestonpans	83	109	45
1 069	Tranent	262	284	66

SOURCE: Department of Health for Scotland, Housing (Overcrowding Survey), Cmd 5171 (1936), Table III.

* Returns received on April 23, 1936.

1930s recorded overcrowded dwellings (as a percentage of all houses) in the burghs of East and Midlothian ranging from 6.0 per cent in Haddington to 25.8 per cent in Musselburgh. In the mining community of Prestonpans 13.6 per cent of the 610 houses surveyed were overcrowded but 54 per cent of such dwellings were owned not by colliery companies but by the local authority. This, in part, reflects the extent to which council housing superseded company housing in much of the Lothian coalfield between the wars. Public sector housing, built to a fairly minimal standard, did not always meet the needs of large families and as the local

authorities assumed responsibility for housing the working-classes they also took over the problems associated with it. Council tenants in the Lothians complained of low standards of maintenance and of delays in getting repairs done, whereas some coal companies had a good reputation in such matters. Houses at Newtongrange, for example, were meticulously maintained by the Lothian Coal Company and in Somerset too the 329 houses owned by colliery companies in the 1940s were kept in good repair.⁽⁵⁸⁾ However, Edinburgh Collieries 'Garden City' at Prestonpans and their development at Tranent deteriorated into a state of some squalor over a period of twenty years or so. In Prestonpans by 1944 twenty-two of the Company's houses were unfit for human habitation and a further 196 were in 'poor condition'. In the burgh of Tranent most of the 248 houses classified as in 'poor condition' and all of the forty-four condemned as unfit belonged to Edinburgh Collieries Ltd. The Company acknowledged that many of its employees lived in sub-let rooms and that much of their property was overcrowded.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Housing conditions in the coalfield were important not merely for their implications for the health and well-being of the mining population but also because the general public's estimation of the status of miners influenced by the commonly-held assumption that all mining communities were drab, dreary places and often characterised by appalling housing and low health standards.

58. Report of the Scottish Coalfields Commission, p.165; Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), p. 46.

59. Report of the Scottish Coalfields Commissions, p.167.

Statistics on the health of the mining communities cannot always be abstracted from figures relating to a wider population but, nonetheless, it is possible to make some observation on the topic. The main causes of death in Somerset for all age groups throughout the inter-war period were the same as those shown in Table III:XIII, although influenza only featured so prominently in years of major epidemics and death from tuberculosis declined fairly constantly to 183 in 1939.⁽⁶⁰⁾

TABLE III:XIII

Main Causes Of Death, Somerset (Administrative County) 1919

<u>Cause of Death</u>	<u>Number of Deaths</u>
Heart Diseases	673
Pneumonia & Bronchitis	645
Malignant Disease	515
Influenza	406
Tuberculosis	388

Source: Annual Reports of the MOH, Somerset (1919), Table I, pp. 4-5.

The majority of deaths in Somerset between the wars were therefore attributable to the degenerative diseases of middle life and old age, whereas in Scotland during the 1920s tuberculosis was the major killer of children, adolescents, young adults and people of early middle age.

60. Annual Reports, Medical Officer of Health, Somerset, 1919-1939 (SRO).

TABLE III:XIV

Principal Causes of Death at Different Ages (Scotland), 1921-1930

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number of Deaths*</u>	<u>Principle Cause of Death</u>	<u>% of all Deaths</u>
Infancy	9280	Diseases of early infancy & malformation	43.4
1 - 4	4844	Bronchitis & Pneumonia	27.7
5 - 9	1216	Tuberculosis	17.3
10 - 14	836	Tuberculosis	26.7
15 - 24	2778	Tuberculosis	40.25
25 - 34	3106	Tuberculosis	31.8
35 - 44	3970	Tuberculosis	19.2
45 - 54	5997	Malignancy	18.0
55 - 64	9174	Malignancy	20.2
65 - 74	12505	Heart Disease	19.1
74 & over	13126	Heart Disease	17.6

Source: Report of the Commission on Scottish Health Services, Cmd 5204 (1936), p 67. * Average annual number of deaths during the period.

Housing conditions in Scotland were a contributory cause of the high death rate from tuberculosis, for the prevalence of overcrowding meant that tuberculosis cases often shared not only a room but sometimes a bed with one or more other people. The death rate from tuberculosis and the incidence of the disease abated somewhat in the 1930s but in 1936 the vital statistics for Scotland were still 'disquietingly less favourable than, those of England and Wales and several other European countries'.⁽⁶¹⁾

61. Report, Committee on Scottish Health Service (1936), Cmd 5204, p.38.

The available material makes it possible to be more specific about changes in birth rate and in infant mortality, although only for the Somerset mining communities.

TABLE III:XV

BIRTH, DEATH & INFANT MORTALITY RATES, RURAL & URBAN DISTRICTS OF THE SOMERSET COALFIELD, 1919

Year	District	Estimated mid-year population	Birth rate	Death rate	Standardised death rate	Infant Mortality rate
RURAL DISTRICTS						
1919	Bath	27,360	17.00	13.36	12.19	58.30
	Clutton	41,133	20.65	12.52	10.88	51.40
	Frome	51,558	16.96	16.70	14.12	60.10
	Shepton Mallet	46,561	17.22	15.20	12.90	46.40
Total rural population		991,705	16.14	14.32	12.04	64.37
URBAN DISTRICTS						
	Frome	1,194	12.19	17.09	15.44	84.60
	Midsomer Norton	3,970	16.98	8.98	9.08	29.40
	Radstock	1,014	20.12	12.52	11.43	27.80
	Shepton Mallet	3,548	12.97	14.00	12.25	125.00
Total urban population		40,738	14.04	13.76	12.61	68.72
Total population, administrative County of Somerset		1,032,443	15.25	14.08	12.25	66.06
1919	England & Wales		18.50	13.80	13.80	89.00

SOURCE: Compiled From Annual Reports, MOH, Somerset (1919)

The decline in family size occurred later and to a lesser extent in mining families than in the working class as a whole. Birth control was not widely advocated by medical authorities in the period and there is evidence that middle-class, male doctors rarely offered working-class women information or advice on

contraceptive methods.⁽⁶²⁾ In Somerset, as elsewhere, midwives and health visitors were the chief official disseminators of knowledge on the subject⁽⁶³⁾ but methods of family limitation and of self-induced abortion were almost certainly passed on from one generation to the next, within the sub-culture of women. Nonetheless, large families were still a feature of mining communities and the highest birth-rates in the county in 1919 were in the urban district of Radstock (20.12) and in Clutton (20.65) rural district. Birth rate in Midsomer Norton was below the average for England and Wales but above the county average. These high birth rates were not, as might be expected, associated with a high rate of infant mortality. At a time when the national average was 89 deaths per 1000 live births, infant mortality in Clutton was 51.4 while it was lower still in Midsomer Norton (29.4) and lowest of all in Radstock, at 27.8.

62. See B. Brookes, 'Women and Reproduction, 1860-1939' in Lewis (ed.) Labour and Love, p.p.147-171; D.Gittins, 'Married Life and Birth Control between the Wars', Oral History, 3(1975), p.p. 53-65. Middle-class marital relations are the subject of E.M. Holtzman's 'The Pursuit of Married Love-Women's Attitudes to Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939', Journal of Social History, 16, 2(1982), p.p. 39-51. Ellen Wilkinson (1891-1947), Jarrow MP and one of the first women trade union organisers, based her 1929 novel Clash on her own experiences including her activities with relief committees in the coalfields during the 1926 mining dispute. See Virago Press edition (1989), p.p.245-248, for a fictionalised account of miners' wives attitudes to birth control.

63. In the whole county of Somerset in 1939 only twenty eight applications for advice on birth control were made at health clinics. Nineteen of the applicants were referred to the clinics by Infant Welfare Visitors.

TABLE III:XVI

BIRTH, DEATH & INFANT MORTALITY RATES, RURAL & URBAN DISTRICTS
OF THE SOMERSET COALFIELD, 1939

District	Estimated mid-year population	Birth rate	Death rate	Standardised death rate	Infant Mortality rate
<u>RURAL DISTRICTS</u>					
Bathavon	17,880	14.98	12.64	10.61	29.70
Clutton	17,000	10.81	10.73	8.75	39.10
Frome	8,345	13.54	13.88	11.52	69.60
Shepton Mallet	9,577	16.18	13.78	11.30	25.80
Total rural population	218,100	13.79	12.07	9.89	36.20
<u>URBAN DISTRICTS</u>					
Frome	10,330	10.55	14.65	11.57	71.40
Norton-Radstock	11,300	17.79	10.94	10.39	59.40
Shepton Mallet	4,218	14.70	11.10	9.21	32.30
Total urban population	191,600	13.54	12.78	10.48	40.10
Total population administrative county	409,700	13.67	12.40	10.18	38.00
England & Wales, 1939		15.00	12.10	12.10	50.00

SOURCE: Compiled From Annual Reports MOH, Somerset (1939)

The birth rate declined throughout the county over the inter-war period, to 13.67 in 1939. In that year, the birth rate in Clutton (10.15) was below the county average but in the central part of the coalfield Norton Radstock showed a rate of 17.79, the highest birth rate in any urban or rural district of Somerset. Infant mortality (generally recognised, together with maternal mortality, as one of the most sensitive indicators of the health of a population) fluctuated annually but was down to 38 for the county in 1939, although extensive variations persisted ranging from 14.3 to 77.6 in rural districts and from 9.7 to 147.1 in urban districts. The maternal mortality rate fluctuated in Somerset between 1910 and 1929 but (in line with the national trend) there was no sustained decline until after 1936. The county rate fell from 2.59 in 1937 to 0.71 in 1939.⁽⁶⁴⁾

64. Annual Reports, MOH, Somerset, 1919-1939 (SRO).

Rates of infant and maternal mortality in some mining communities between the wars caused contemporary concern⁽⁶⁵⁾ but historians continue to debate the issue of whether or not any direct link can be established between high or rising rates and the incidence of unemployment, or of poverty associated with low wages.⁽⁶⁶⁾ However, the unfavourable contrast in infant mortality rates in Radstock and Midsomer Norton in 1939 and 1919 must surely owe something to the relative deprivation of the inter-war years compared to the economic position of miners' families in the bouyant years from 1914 to 1919. There is evidence to suggest that there was little ground for complacency over maternal health standards in the Lothian mining communities in the late 1920s. Figures compiled by the Central Midwives Board (Scotland) for 1928 show that in the areas listed in Table III:XVII infant deaths in the first ten days of life averaged 22.1 per 1000 live births. Almost a third (30.2 per cent) of confinements ended in still birth. Infant deaths were proportionally higher in Dalkeith and in Tranent than elsewhere, while only Edinburgh and the Lanarkshire mining area of Coatbridge showed a higher incidence of still births than Tranent and Dalkeith.

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65. See Report on the Investigation in the Coalfields of South Wales and Monmouthshire (1929), Cmd 3272.
66. J. Winter, 'Unemployment, Nutrition and Infant Mortality in Britain, 1920 -1950' in Winter (ed), The Working Class in Modern British History. Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling (Cambridge, 1983), p.p. 232-56; C. Webster, 'Healthy or Hungry Thirties?', History Workshop (Spring 1988) 110-29; M. Mitchell, 'The Effects of unemployment on the Social Condition of Woman and Children in the 1930s', History Workshop, 19 (Spring, 1985), p.p. 105-27. See also C. Petty and J. Rivers 'Problems in Assessing Status in Historical Studies', Bulletin Soc. for the Social History of Medicine, 38 (June, 1986), p.p. 77-83.

TABLE III:XVII

TOTAL BIRTHS IN SEVEN SCOTTISH BURGHS, 1928, SHOWING RATES OF INFANT MORTALITY,

Burgh	Total number of births	Infant deaths within first ten days	Rate per 1000	Total still births	Rate per 1000
<u>Dalkeith</u>	155	6	38.70	5	32.00
Coatbridge	1,225	23	18.80	49	40.00
<u>Cockenzie</u>	66	1	15.20	1	15.20
Edinburgh	7,985	218	27.30	357	44.70
<u>Musselburgh</u>	304	6	19.70	7	23.00
<u>Prestonpans</u>	71	1	14.10	1	14.10
<u>Tranent</u>	94	2	21.30	4	42.60

SOURCE: Annual Report, Central Midwives Board, Scotland (1928).

Nutritionally inadequate diets may well have contributed to the incidence of infant deaths and stillbirths. Doctors, health visitors and school inspectors all encouraged healthy eating habits between the wars⁽⁶⁷⁾ but the diet of the unemployed was often inadequate in both quality and quantity. When Dr. Jones joined a medical practice^c in Somerset in 1929 he found that poverty in the coalfields was rife but mainly attributable to low wages and short time, rather than unemployment:

The average miner's dinner was a plate of potatoes. Sometimes it would have a tiny rasher of bacon or an egg on top of it. These men had no ounce of fat on them but as long as they kept free from pneumoconiosis they were fit and tough. Paying five or six shillings a week in rent and bringing up two or three children on less than thirty shillings a week, they made our own income and prospects seem like riches. Children still developed rickets and their resistance to infection was dismal. ⁽⁶⁸⁾

67. J. Lewis, 'The Working Class Mother and State Intervention' in Lewis, Labour and Love, p.p. 99-122.

68. K. Lane, Diary of a Medical Nobody, p.p. 61-2.

As an assessment of the diet and health of the average miner, the key point here is that they were 'fit and tough' unless stricken with industrial disease. The popularity of gardening on a large scale, the widespread practice^c of keeping pigs and poultry, together with the predominance of dairy farming in the area almost certainly meant that miners' families in Somerset had a more varied and nutritious diet than their counterparts in some coalfields. Furthermore, children were still sent out to gather nuts, wild fruit and mushrooms in season. "Wall fruits" (snails, roasted like chestnuts on a shovel in hot embers) were still a popular delicacy among the miners and rabbits featured in many diets. Those who lacked the skill or the nerve to take 'one for the pot' could often buy a six-penny carcass from neighbours. Smoked or fresh trout was also on the menu occasionally, as in the 1926 dispute when one of the many trout-bearing streams in the district was damned by young men from Paulton, who took fish from the pool as required for their families and friends. Pools at Camerton and elsewhere were regularly fished by miners.

The health of children in the coalfield cannot be isolated from statistics for the county but it was undoubtedly affected by dietary standards. The education authorities provided school meals for only a small number of malnourished children in the coalfield at times in the 1920s and deficiency diseases were not widespread among the child population of Somerset.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The condition of children admitted to Clutton Union Workhouse (which

69. Annual Reports, MOH, Somerset, 1919-1939 (SRO).

served the whole area of the coalfield) suggests, however, that diets were often insufficient. References recur to children being 'very thin', 'poorly nourished' or in 'good health but underdeveloped'. Such children were likely to come from the poorer sections of the working class, in which overcrowded or insanitary housing could undermine a mother's best efforts to keep her family healthy. The state of the Billet children may serve as an example.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Ranging in ages from one year to thirteen years they were admitted to the Workhouse in November 1929, presumably at a time of temporary family crisis as they were discharged together some two months later. All six of the children were described as 'well nourished' but only the baby was in perfect health. The other five had multiple flea bites. Three of them also had 'nits in head' and four of the five had severe impetigo as well. The children were 'healthy and well' when they left the Workhouse but it seems highly likely that these problems soon recurred after their return home.

There is evidence that the diets of children in the Lothians were also less than adequate. Undernourishment and malnutrition were not widespread among the school population of East Lothian in 1936 but some nutritional failing may be inferred from the fact that 3,639 children (over half of those examined) had 'very defective' teeth.⁽⁷¹⁾ The school inspector's report reveals that applications on behalf of children for boots, clothing or

70. D/G/CL, 73(b)2; 77(b)3, Clutton Board of Guardians, Medical Examinations of Children (SRO).

71. HH 62 /212 (1936); HH 62 /214 (1938), County MOH Reports, Annual Reports on the Medical Inspection of Schoolchildren, East Lothian (WRH, Edinburgh).

extra nourishment numbered 852 in 1936 in East Lothian, falling to 499 applications in 1938. Just under 6 per cent of applicants were refused in both years, which suggests that the lower figure for the latter year reflects some improvement in the economic standards of families, rather than any change of policy by school managers. Among Midlothian school children in 1936 there were few cases of gross malnutrition and not much evidence of underfeeding but the inspector identified the dietary problem as 'not so much want of food as of the suitability of the food provided... meals far too often consist of tea and bread, or rolls or scones or buns'. He urged that milk should be supplied free in the schools because he believed many children refused their allowance not - as they claimed - out of dislike for it but 'out of a sense of loyalty to parents who are unable or unwilling to pay for a supply'. In 1939 the diagnosis of 'bad nutrition' in Midlothian scholars was confined to less than 1 per cent, as was the incidence of impetigo and scabies. A general improvement in nutrition had probably strengthened childrens' resistance to infection, although 8.4 per cent were classified as 'unclean' in head or body. The state of childrens' clothing was 'generally very satisfactory' by 1939 but mothers were now criticised for burdening children with an 'excess' of garments in place of the 'insufficiency' of earlier years. They were urged to wash clothes more frequently and repair them 'sooner rather than later', a comment that also applied to boots. In stressing that repairs cost less than a new pair of boots, the inspector hinted that charity was undermining thrift: 'the seeming unwillingness to

spend money on repairs appears to apply particularly to those who obtain boots through the Education Committee'.(72)

The state of childrens' boots, shoes and bodily cleanliness was, however, of significance to children as well as to the school inspectors, as Mrs. S. from Somerset emphasised in recalling her childhood in the 1920s. Her father never fully recovered from an injury sustained in a roof fall and with no compensation (as far as Mrs. S. can remember) he earned what he could by picking coal from the batches for sale and doing odd jobs such as plucking chickens for a local butcher. Her mother helped to support the family by taking in washing. The family lived in the Butter Buildings / Tynning area of Radstock and Mrs. S. considered hers to be one of the few 'tidy and respectable' households living there. Nonetheless, she suffered from the social stigma that was attached to the place, where twenty or more people shared an outside privy, where mud was often ankle-deep along the unmade back alleys and where on summer evenings it was not unusual to see mothers washing their babies in buckets of water in doorways. There was competition to avoid sitting next to a 'Tynnings kid' at school because many of them were dirty, verminous and dressed 'practically in rags'. Moreover, the notoriously quick-tempered teacher was not above punishing children for their poverty and boys were frequently beaten for going to school in tattered boots.(73)

72. HH 62 /245 (1936); HH 62 /214 (1938) (WRH Edinburgh), Annual Reports, Medical Inspection of Schoolchildren, Midlothian.

73. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Radstock, July 1987.

The degree of social stratification that existed within the mining communities is reflected in the contrast between the above experience of childhood and that of Hilda Carter, born in 1913. Her father, Ted Carter, worked as a miner until 1921 and thereafter for the poor law authorities. He was the archetypal respectable working man: a tee-total and non-smoking Methodist lay preacher, staunch co-operator, Labour and trade union activist, a local councillor and a JP. He owned his own house at Hope Place, Paulton, and by the early 1930s he was also a car owner. Hilda and her elder sister grew up in solid comfort, taking for granted their birthday parties, piano lessons and annual seaside holiday. Yet there was no impassable gulf of experience between families like the Carters and those who shared the same class position but were economically and socially more deprived. Ted Carter signed 'on the dole' during two periods of unemployment between the wars and in the mid 1930s the family faced a prolonged crisis all too familiar to others, when Hilda developed tuberculosis and was hospitalised for some twelve months. (74)

In families like the Carters, marriage was a model of domestic patriarchy. Within the mining culture (as in working-class culture generally) the patriarchal concept of a male bread winner as head of household, supporting his wife and children, was firmly embedded by the late nineteenth century, even though low wages, casual and seasonal work made the ideal unrealisable for

74. Hilda Dowling nee Carter, Paulton. The diaries of E.T. Carter, 1918-1945, in the possession of Mrs. Dowling.

many of the working class. It nonetheless legitimised patriarchal rule in the family and the economic power of a husband in relation to his wife and children, as well as male abstention from domestic labour.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Tensions in marriages of this type often centred on questions of male privilege and the allocation of resources, as Denis et al found in the mining community of Ashton in the early 1950s, where marriage was 'a business-like division of duties and work to which the development of affection and companionship [was] accidental'.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Such bleak views of the marriage relationship have been countered by Jane Lewis and other historians, who have argued that the sexual division of labour between the male breadwinner and female household manager created a relationship in which husband and wife were as likely as not to support each other in mutual efforts to achieve the shared ideal.⁽⁷⁷⁾

Irrefutable evidence to prove theories about marriage is elusive but the impression gained from personal testimony supports the arguments of Lewis. A clear division of responsibility on gender lines and often sharply-segregated social lives seem to have been commonplace but the system gave both partners a degree of autonomy within the family. There is no reason to suppose that

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75. W. Secombe, 'Patriarchy Stabilised: the construction of the male breadwinner norm in nineteenth century Britain', Social History, Vol.11, No.1 (1986), p.p.53-75.
76. Dennis et. al., Coal is Our Life, p.183. Their analysis of the marriage relationship is in Chapter V, 'The Family', p.p. 171-245.
77. Lewis(ed.) Labour and Love, p.p. 17-18, also Roberts, A Woman's Place, passim. On marital conflict pre 1914, see E. Ross, '"Fierce Questions and Taunts." Married Life in Working Class London, 1870-1914', Feminist Studies, 8(1982). Recent developments in the literature on the family are surveyed by R. Whipp in a review article on Tamara Harevan's Family Time and Industrial Time, Bulletin SSLH (Spring, 1985), p.p.46-8.

many husbands and wives did not regard themselves as "equal but other". Moreover, the rigid division between the public life of men and the private lives of women was breaking down as a mass labour movement emerged. Women rarely challenged their traditional roles even though they became increasingly involved in the labour movement after 1918. Their interest in health, housing, childcare, education and living standards represented an extension into the public sphere of women's responsibilities in the private sphere of family. Yet the fact that they were there, in growing albeit small numbers, in women's sections of the Labour party, Co-operative Womens' Guilds and other organisations reflected their increasing politicisation and the growing determination of at least some women to influence events.⁽⁷⁸⁾

At a practical level, women maintained their informal trade unionism by various means of support encompassed in 'neighbouring' practices. Women who flouted the social norms and moral conventions of a community risked being ostracised⁽⁷⁹⁾ but few took the risk, for there was much in favour of getting on with the neighbours. Evidence about 'neighbouring' is almost as elusive as that about marriage relationships but the SMA compensation file contains details of a case that gives some indication of the role of neighbours in womens' lives. It also shows the existence and operation of informal networks of friendship and associational links between key figures in the

78. Evidence from the Scottish coal mining communities in the 1940s suggests that only a small minority of women were politically active. See below, p. 168.

79. E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War I', History Workshop Journal, 15 (1982), p.p. 3-27; R. Crook '"Tidy Women", Women in the Rhondda Between the Wars', Oral History, 10 (1982), p.p. 40-6.

Somerset coalfield. In May 1924 a fifteen year old carting boy, Douglas Kingman, was taken ill and eventually admitted to hospital in Bath where he died of blood poisoning. The Clutton Relieving Officer, W.J. Bird, had arranged the boy's admission to hospital at the request of the family doctor. Bird, however, went beyond his official duties and questioned the mother closely about when and where the boy had sustained his initial injury. What he discovered from Mrs. Kingman prompted him to write to his personal friend and co-member of the Labour party, Fred Swift, agent to the SMA:

From what I learned today it appears fairly certain that the trouble arose from the boy having met with a slight scratch on his hand last Wednesday week while at work.... I may add that his parents are quite illiterate and hardly capable of appreciating the importance of the fact of injury whilst at work. The family are very poor... had I known of the suggestion of injury before, I would have let you have the facts earlier.⁽⁸⁰⁾

The tone of the letter suggests that Bird routinely made informal inquiries in similar cases and sent significant information to the miners' union. The immediate source of help for the Kingman family was, however, Mrs. Minall. She had been a friendly neighbour for nine years and was 'visiting' Mrs Kingman when Douglas first came home ill. She stayed to help bathe and bandage his cut and was 'sent in for' a week later, when the boy's condition became acutely worse. It was on Mrs. Minall's advice that a doctor was called and she was again with the family when the ambulance arrived to take Douglas to hospital. After his death, it was at Mrs. Minall's suggestion that the illiterate

80. Letter from R.J.Bird to Fred Swift, n.d., c. May 1924, Compensation Files, Misc. papers and press cuttings relating to the Kingsman case (SMA Archive, BUL)

Mrs. Kingman walked three miles or so to Paulton to ask Ted Carter's advice about a letter from the coroner's office. Carter also questioned her closely and he too contacted Fred Swift about the matter. The compensation case was eventually abandoned on legal advice and it seems that Mrs Kingman again turned to her neighbour for help when she learned of this, on August 8, 1924. The following day, Mrs. Minall wrote to Fred Swift to ask the agent if the union would organise a collection at Clandown colliery for the Kingman family.⁽⁸¹⁾

'Visiting' with neighbours, as Mrs. Minall did, was a major social activity for many home-centered women, while for others their social life outside the home and family centred on church or chapel-based activities. Religion reinforced patriarchy and even in the minority of mixed gender groups women rarely held high office or were more than a token presence on administrative committees. Women were among the forty or so members of the Midsomer Norton Methodist Brotherhood and often formed a majority in the average attendance (of twelve to twenty) at monthly meetings but their role and significance was diminished by the very name of the organisation. A suggestion in the early 1930s that the title be changed to 'Brotherhood and Sisterhood' was rejected on the grounds that 'goodwill among sisters could be interpreted as an expression of the wider meanings of the term "Brotherhood"'.⁽⁸²⁾ In the Scottish coalfields in the 1940s,

81. Collections were usually taken not only for families of miners killed in the pit but also for those who were bereaved by a death in the family, so it seems likely that Mrs. Minall's request was granted.

82. Minutes, Midsomer Norton Methodist Brotherhood (1925-1938) (Midsomer Norton Library), November 15, 1933.

24 per cent of housewives interviewed by the Social Survey said they attended church social activities but only 9 per cent of miners did.⁽⁸³⁾ The sheer number and variety of church based activities in Somerset (in both Anglican and Non-Conformist churches) together with the weight of oral evidence suggests that male participation was higher than in the Scottish coalfields, where religion was probably of less significance in general.

The union leadership in both areas was characterised by membership of the ILP and it is therefore likely that the roots of their socialism lay in Christianity rather than in secular sources.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Moreover, in Somerset there was a close association with religion among the Labour leadership, be it Anglican, Baptist or Methodist. A local Baptist, Walter Beard, found that his political radicalism led him into conflict with the Minister, which culminated in Beard leaving the church for a period in the 1920s. Some of his speeches indicate a deep distrust of organised religion and its ministers but a strong personal faith in God. Whereas Beard's integration with the Christian faith was weakened by his socialism, the radical Oliver Lewis had a totally different experience. Speaking from an ILP platform in the 1920s, he told his audience that in the past 'he could not love a God that ordered thousands to lead starved and stunted lives' but the 'study of socialism as Keir Hardie taught it' had reconciled him to Christ.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The close association between religion and socialism may have been typical of only the leadership for in the country as a whole religion was a declining force, as secularism

83. Social Survey, Scottish Coalfields (PRO), p.47.

84. S.Yeo. 'A New Life: the Religion of Socialism, 1883-1896', History Workshop, 4 (1977), p.p.5-56.

85. Somerset Guardian, February 10, 1922.

eroded belief and the practice of church attendance. Nonetheless, local leaders couched many of their speeches (especially in the 1920s) in the language and rhetoric of the Bible and although 'a bit of "Come to Jesus" ' could be used for cynical manipulation⁽⁸⁶⁾ the dominant themes of speeches (and the enthusiastic response they often received) suggests that a religious world view was widely shared. Walking into the promised land was the projected vision but the new world was to be a Christian heaven, even if it was also a socialist republic.

Between the wars the holidays kept in the Scottish coalfields were not (as in England and Wales) the Christian festivals of Easter, Whitsuntide and Christmas but (other than Christmas Day) the secular ones of Hogmanay and Glasgow Fair Week. Moreover, overtime working on Sundays was commonplace whereas personal testimony indicates that the Sabbath was still quite strictly kept in some Somerset families. By the 1940s religion was certainly of little significance in the Scottish coalfields, if attendance at a place of worship can be equated with belief. About half (49 per cent) of housewives and over two-thirds (68 per cent) of miners interviewed for the Social Survey inquiry said that they never went to church.⁽⁸⁷⁾ It seems that in

86. R. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics. The Effect of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community (Cambridge, 1974) p.185.

87. Social Survey, Scottish Coalfields (PRO), p.98; Church attendance in Scotland generally remained high until the 1950s and it had been argued that the links between religion and socialism persisted longer (especially in the West of Scotland) than they did in England. See W. Knox, (Conference Report) 'Religion and the Scottish Labour Movement, 1900-1939', Bulletin SSLH, Vol. 5', Part 1 (April, 1986), p.p.11-12; see also C. Gwyther, 'Sidelights on Religion and Politics in the Rhondda Valley, 1906-26', LLafur, 3, 1 (1980), p.p.30-43.

Somerset and the Lothians the process that Moore identified in the mining communities of Durham in the late nineteenth century to the opening decades of the twentieth century was underway.⁽⁸⁸⁾ While Methodism and socialism coincided for much of the late nineteenth century, Moore has argued that the differentiation of political and religious institutions began with the rise of socialism and accelerated with the development of a mass Labour party after the first World War. It seems likely that, as with so much else, the differentiation began later in Somerset than elsewhere and that the process of change was a slow one.

Beyond church, trade unionism and politics, there was a wide range of activities competing for the free time of miners and their families. The main innovations in leisure pursuits in the inter-war period were the growing popularity of dancing and of the cinema and "wireless".⁽⁸⁹⁾ The activities traditionally associated with mining communities were, however, well represented in both coalfields. Pigeon-racing, gardening, breeding canaries and greyhounds, playing or watching football were all commonplace although the more time-consuming and costly specialisms of canary and greyhound breeding were confined to the Lothians.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Gambling was associated with many of these

88. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, passim.

89. See J. Walvin, Leisure and Society, 1830-1950 (1978), passim.

90. See R. Mc Kibbin, 'Work and Hobbies in Britain, 1880-1950' in J. Winter (ed) Working Class in Modern British History, p.p.127-47. The more costly hobbies were commonly associated with high wage districts where, as in the Lothians, there were also likely to be fewer allotments because there was less need for men to spend free-time gardening. On the association of gambling with some of the miners pastimes see Mc Kibbin, 'Working Class Gambling in Britain, 1880-1939', Past and Present, No.82 (1979), p.p.147-78.

activities (in Newtongrange even the canaries were worth a bet on their placing in the annual fancy bird show) but most of them also provided opportunities for supplementing income in a small way and all of them had scope for individual competitiveness. The useful hobby of gardening, for example, gave Ted Carter of Paulton 19/- in prize money in August 1923 (almost a third of his weekly wage) and he took great satisfaction in outdoing acknowledged experts: 'Took first prize with onions, Beating R. Denning', he noted in his diary on one occasion.

In neither area did employers or the middle classes play an extensive part in the miners' free time activities. Football teams and such like in the mining settlement of Newtongrange were inevitably associated closely with the Lothian Coal company but men played for their community, not the colliery. The Prestonlinks' Pipe Band was a work-based organisation but it was sponsored by the union branch, not the employers. Similarly, the junior league organised for the 'fit'ba mad' boys of Prestonpans had no middle-class sponsorship and it was a working miner who donated the annual trophy. In Somerset, a few coal owners and colliery managers participated in some church-based activities and 'improving' pastimes (such as running first aid courses) and Louis Beauchamp was president of Radstock Boxing Club but there were no official colliery football teams and prizes awarded at fetes, horticultural shows or sports days were presented by Labour leaders or popular professional people such as a local doctor. The Radstock Working Mens Club (which had been firmly under employer control in the 1890s) was independent of middle class influence by the inter-war period.

The leisure activities of Scottish miners and housewives were one of the topics investigated by the Social Survey inquiry into Scottish mining communities in 1946, in which some 20 per cent of the total sample was drawn from the Lothian coalfield.⁽⁹¹⁾ Miners and housewives were asked how often they visited certain social and recreational institutions and what facilities, not within their reach, they would like to have. The facilities most essential to the Scottish miner were the cinema, football and the public house. Two-thirds of housewives said that shopping and visits to the cinema were their main recreations. For both men and women all other activities that they were questioned about were only minority interests, although sometimes fairly large minorities.⁽⁹²⁾

More than 50 per cent of both miners and housewives went to the cinema once a week or more but this was the only social activity in which men and women participated almost equally.⁽⁹³⁾ Watching football was almost entirely a miners' pastime: over the whole housewife's sample 98 per cent said they never went to a football match. Over a third (34 per cent) of miners said they never attended matches but 31 per cent went once a week and a further 34 per cent watched football once a month or less.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Few miners actually played football or other games. Overall, 78 per cent of the men interviewed took no part in outdoor sports. Even in the age group twenty to twenty-nine 71 per cent never did so,

91. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities (1946), RG 23/72, p.9.

92. *ibid*, p.p.93-94.

93. 55 per cent of miners and 53 per cent of housewives visited the cinema, once, twice or three times a week. Miners were not asked questions about shopping.

94. *ibid*, p.101.

although 15 per cent of miners in their twenties participated in some sport at least once a week. (95)

Only 4 per cent of miners ever went to a working mens' club but 18 per cent of those who did not said that this was because there was no club in their neighbourhood but that they would like to have one there. When asked about frequenting public houses, 37 per cent of miners interviewed said they never went to a pub but 53 per cent visited a public house at frequencies ranging from once a week to once a month. A minority of miners (5 per cent) went to a pub every day but the largest proportion of the total who used pubs was the 29 per cent who went once a week. (96)

Church-based social activities were most popular among housewives in the age group forty to forty-nine but only 24 per cent of all housewives (and 9 per cent of miners) ever attended such activities. It was also middle-aged women who were the mainstay of the Co-operative Womens Guild. The overwhelming majority of housewives in all age groups (ranging from 88 per cent to 97 per cent) took no part in Guild activities but of the small group who did so the most prominent were the 8 per cent of those aged forty to forty-nine who attended once a week. (97)

Dancing, visiting the library, watching horse or dog racing and going to the theatre or music hall were minority interests, apparently influenced by age, gender and the accessibility of the institution. Dancing was almost a monopoly of younger people.

95. *ibid*, p.105. Women were not asked if they took part in outdoor sports.

96. *ibid.*, p.p.108-09, Women were also excluded from these questions.

97. *ibid.*, p.100; p.114. An insignificant proportion of the total sample said they would have gone to church social activities but none were provided in their locality.

The library was visited once a week by 16 per cent of both miners and housewives but after the age of forty women used the library with markedly decreasing frequency and a similar trend (although less marked) was discernable among miners.(98)

Watching horse or dog racing was, like football, an almost exclusively male form of recreation, although only a minority of miners (20 per cent) ever went to either kind of racing.(99) Over 70 per cent of the total sample never went to a theatre or music hall but age and gender were of less significance in relation to this activity than they were to most others. Over 37 per cent of all miners and housewives who 'never went' would have liked to do so but had no theatre or music hall in their neighbourhood. Accessibility restricted this activity for some of those who enjoyed it, for 47 per cent of theatre-goers who had to travel over three and a half miles for their recreation said they would go more frequently but for the journey involved.(100)

Very little free-time was devoted to political or trade union activity in the Scottish coalfields. Only 3 per cent of all housewives ever went to political or trade unions meetings. Over one-third of the miners said that they did so but men in this category mostly attended meetings less than once a month. The small minority who took part in these activities at least once a week was no more than 1 per cent in all age groups except thirty to thirty-nine (4 per cent) and fifty to fifty-nine (2 per cent).(101)

98. *ibid.*, p.p. 96-97.

99. *ibid.*, p.103.

100. *ibid.*, p.p. 95-96.

101. *ibid.*, p.108.

No such detailed information on leisure in the Somerset coalfield is available but a few key points can be identified from what evidence there is. Major annual events were inclusive, bringing together people from throughout the district; there was no sharp division between 'serious' pursuits and other pastimes (an interest in 'improving' activities did not necessarily imply disapproval of or disinterest in other ways of spending free-time); sport and politics were not mutually exclusive. A few examples illustrate these points. Like the Clutton Flower Show and Paulton Hospital Fete, the Frome Divisional Labour Party's annual fete and demonstration was an immensely popular event throughout the period. At the first one, held on Whit Monday 1919, a crowd of over 7000 enjoyed a day out that included a parade of trade union banners, brass band performances, sports competitions, tea and beer tents, various side shows and a waltzing competition, as well as general dancing and political speeches in the evening. Entry was free but voluntary collections for party funds raised a sum that 'exceeded all expectations'.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The presence of a beer tent at the Labour fete is significant, for if Labour was to succeed it had to appeal across sectional lines and bridge the gulf between the respectable and the rough. The temperance movement was still a force in the Somerset coalfield and the 'drink question' was very much a live issue in the early 1920s⁽¹⁰³⁾ even though Methodist bigotry was by this time declining to some extent. A Labour fete

102. Somerset Guardian, June 13, 1919.

103. Controversy over whether or not beer should be served at celebrations to welcome returning soliders 'quite marred the day' in both Paulton and Midsomer Norton. When the Radstock Recreation Ground committee allowed a beer tent at its 1920 fete this provoked some resignations and a sharp exchange of views in letters to the press.

held jointly by branches from four of the villages in 1919 was organised by the Methodist teetotaler Ted Carter. The event was held in a field owned by the Timsbury Temperance Hall but refreshments were supplied by the licensee of the Red Lion Inn.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Moreover, Carter's temperance did not preclude him from paying out union funds in the public bar of the Red Lion during the 1921 lockout, nor from distributing boots to needy children from the club room of the Lamb Inn in 1926. His personal taste for self-improvement was reflected in attendance at first-aid courses, WEA lectures and classes run by the Co-operative Education Committee. Much of his time was taken up with trade unionism, the Labour party and chapel activities, including lay-preaching on virtually every Sunday. Yet he also played in the Paulton Prize Band as a young man (and later became president of the Band Society) and, what is more, was also a breeder of racing pigeons and chairman of the Homing Society. He was a keen sportsman in his youth, one of the best mile runners in the district and a player in both the village cricket and football teams. Football was an abiding passion. Throughout the inter-war years he frequently travelled long distances specifically to watch major matches between prominent teams and at conferences of the Labour party or the Druids Friendly Society (of which he was national president at one period) he usually managed to slip away to watch a match somewhere. His primary loyalty was to his local team, Paulton Rovers. He rarely missed a game, either home or away, and every Saturday he meticulously recorded in his diary

104. Somerset Guardian, August 1, 1919. Oliver Lewis, a prominent left-winger who held office in the SMA, was chairman of the management committee of the Temperance Hall at Timsbury.

the final score. Once his playing days were over, he became life-long chairman of the football club. Another Labour activist and lay - preacher, Walter Beard (whose activities included teaching classes in Esperanto at Radstock), was a football player in his youth and always an avid supporter of the Radstock team and of Bristol City. Fred Swift, S.M.A. agent (and Labour county councillor, founder member of Radstock ILP, president of Frome Labour Party,⁽¹⁰⁵⁾) played regularly for the Radstock team and was selected for the Somerset County side for four seasons. He was also a good all-round cricketer with something of a local reputation for his particular skills as bowler.

An intense interest in sport, especially football, seems to have been shared by the local leadership with the mass of the miners. The Somerset Guardian had no sports page as such but the edition of February 13 1920 carried on page six only a quarter-column report on 'Coal Industry Figures' (a matter of some importance to the bulk of its readers, one might suppose) amid detailed reports of football matches in the Bath, Bristol and Wiltshire leagues as well as all those played in the coalfield and in the rest of the county. This was not untypical for throughout the period, even at the height of the industrial disputes of the 1920s, sport was given equal if not greater prominence than "news". This interest in sport, like the general adherence to religion, was reflected in the language and rhetoric of local

105. J.M.Bellamy and J.Saville (eds.) Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol.II (1975) p.p. 361-363. On the general popularity of football see Mc Kibbin, 'Work and Hobbies' in Winter (ed) Working Class in Modern British Society, p.p.132-33 and Tony Mason, Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915 (1980), especially chapter eight 'Football and the Workers', p.p.222-243.

leaders, in references to 'sportsmanship', 'fair play', 'team spirit' and similar allusions in their speeches.

Moreover, the passion for football spilled over into working life. Although there were no official colliery teams, a village side was often closely associated with a particular colliery especially in the early part of the period, before pit closures made it increasingly less common for a man to live and work in the same village. Employers and managers may well have encouraged sporting activities. It has been claimed that 'if you could play football pretty good, you could get a job at Camerton', one of Sir Frank Beauchamp's pits in the SCL group. Miners at Camerton (and probably in Beauchamp's other pits) all started the Saturday shift at 4a.m., an hour earlier than usual, so that they finished in time for players and spectators to get to the matches.(106)

In the Writhlington and Kilmersdon collieries footballers (playing for various local teams) were allowed to finish an hour before their workmates, a concession which presumably meant that the Company bore the cost of an extra winding. The style of management was always more conciliatory in this group than in Beauchamp's SCL but, nonetheless, no ballots on questions that did not directly relate to work in the Company's pits were allowed and the union was obliged to make written application to the manager for permission to post notices about the annual lodge meeting. Yet in 1923 it was the manager who wrote to the lodge secretary, to ask if all the men would agree to work an extra hour on one weekday so they could finish early together on

106. N.C. MacMillan, 'Coal Mining at Camerton. A short history of the local industry', unpublished typescript, Avon Industrial Buildings Group, 1988.

Saturdays 'to avoid footballers having to leave the pit before completion of their shifts'. The lodge committee informed the manager that the men would not agree and there, it seems, the matter ended.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ It was a small triumph in the context of the major industrial defeats of the 1920s but as an assertion of independence it must surely have been something of a morale-booster for the miners at Writhlington and Kilmersdon.

Links between work and leisure were to some degree extended between the wars, by the operation of the Miners' Welfare Scheme. In 1920, the government established the Miners' Welfare Fund (based on a levy of 1d per ton of output) which was to be administered by a Miners' Welfare Committee in the interest of the 'social well-being, recreation and conditions of living' of miners and their communities - including education and research but excluding housing.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

It may well be, as one researcher in the field suggests, that the scheme appealed to coal owners 'as a means of keeping government and public opinion off their backs... a relatively cheap and easy way of proving that they were "good" and caring employers'⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ but it did generally improve the social amenities in the coalfields. In some company towns and villages these were already of a comparatively high standard but had, in effect, been paid for by the communities and not by direct employer benevolence. The Arncliffe Coal Company, for example, opened the Gothenburg

107. Minute Books, Writhlington and Kilmersdon Lodge Committee (SMA Archive, BUL), February 6, 1923.

108. Supple, History of the British Coal Industry, Vol. IV, p.145

109. J.M. Murphy, 'Housing, class and politics in a company town: Ashington, 1896-1936', M.A. dissertation, University of Durham (1983), p.152.

public house in Arniston and used profits from its takings to provide recreation grounds, parks and bowling greens in the early 1920s and to build a hall at a cost of £6,000. The Lothian Coal Company was quick to follow this example and allowed the Dean Tavern (the first and only licensed premises) at Newtongrange to be run for the same purpose.

Miners' Institutes, recreation grounds and pithead baths were funded by the Lothian and Somerset schemes but the social amenities provided do not seem to have been widely used in the Lothians and in Somerset there was some resentment when baths were installed at Pensford colliery, after the men had made it clear they would prefer to have a canteen. Schemes proposed in the Timsbury area of Somerset in 1922 reflected the interests of union activists rather than the miners at large. The Camerton representative proposed an extension to the reading room at Meadgate, while the suggestion from Timsbury was for a library and reading room. After public meetings had been held to test local opinion, all five villages applied for 'hut and recreation field'.(110)

By the late 1930s there were fourteen Miners' Institutes of varying sizes in the coalfield providing indoor facilities (such as games rooms, libraries, wireless sets and billiard tables) and also sports grounds, bowling greens and tennis courts. Some small charge was made but retired and unemployed miners had free access to all facilities. This, however, was said not to have encouraged unemployed men in Timsbury to frequent the Institute in 1937, as they preferred to 'support the Village Club'.(111) There were

110. Minutes, Miners Welfare Committee, Timsbury Area (SMA Archive, BUL), January 11, 1922; January 30, 1922.

111. *ibid.*, October 2, 1934.

Women's Committees at some Institutes but their activities were largely confined to organising teas or socials for children and the elderly. It seems likely that it was not until after nationalisation that the Miners' Institute came to rival if not replace the pub or Working Men's Club⁽¹¹²⁾ as a favourite place for relaxation. The Welfare Institutes in the Scottish coalfields as a whole were certainly not widely patronised in the 1940s. Only 5 per cent of housewives were recorded as ever attending indoor activities and although a minority of about one third of miners went to the Institute once a week or more, 63 per cent said that they never went. Outdoor activities were even less popular. 'Never go' was the response of 99 per cent of housewives and of 95 per cent of miners.⁽¹¹³⁾

Frequency of attendance among the few who did use the facilities declined with age and (in all age groups) with distance from home to the Institute. Reluctance to use the Institute may have indicated merely a preference for other activities or locations but it might also reflect resistance to the role of employers who were represented on the district and national committees. Moreover, the scheme and its very title, 'Miners' Welfare' were not necessarily altogether welcome in the coalfields. Its introduction marked out the mining communities as socially deprived areas, while 'Welfare' had connotations of charity and middle class "good works". Well intentioned though it was, it was a part of the inter-war experience that shifted the collective

112. In the 1940s in the Scottish coalfields the pub was a far more popular venue for recreation than either the Miners' Institute or a Working Men's Club. See above p.167.

113. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities (PRO), p.p. 105-08.

perspective of the miners and arguably contributed to a loss of pride in their communities.

There were evidently considerable regional differences in the social context of mining, with particularly significant intra-regional differences in the Lothians. Dependency on the Lothian Coal Company for both jobs and homes fostered social deference in Newtongrange, where miners' families lived under the watchful eye of Mungo Mackay and the company policeman. The anonymity of grid-pattern streets of identical houses and the rapid development of the town were potentially alienating influences but the high standard of housing and social amenities were a source of satisfaction to some residents. Company control was not inevitably perceived as oppressive. As in the Dukeries,⁽¹¹⁴⁾ there were those who appreciated the tidy gardens, clean streets and "respectable" behaviour enforced under the system.

In Prestonpans the dominance of the coal companies was mitigated by the lack of an employer or middle-class presence in the community. The coincidence of place of residence with place of work in Prestonpans (as in areas like Wallyford and Tranent) was likely to reinforce work-based solidarities whereas these were less likely to be carried over into the free time of miners living in Edinburgh or in towns such as Dalkeith, Musselburgh and Haddington. In Somerset, miners were concentrated in the towns of Radstock and Midsomer Norton, in some of the villages and small hamlets but in general the mining population was a scattered one. A neighbour was as likely to be a farm labourer as a miner in many places. The close links between the two main industries

114. Waller, The Dukeries op.cit.

created the potential for sectionalism to be overcome by wider class consciousness. Moreover, although the coalfield spread over several urban and rural districts, it was often perceived as an entity, set apart and defined by its distinctive culture. Religion was a significant (though declining) influence on social and political consciousness in Somerset but apparently less relevant in the Lothians. The chief leisure activities of the miners in both coalfields were essentially independent. The evidence from Somerset suggests that some of them, particularly football, formed vertical ties of shared interests between all strata of the working class. The coal owners made an enforced contribution to the social capital of the mining communities through the Miners' Welfare Scheme but only a minority of miners made full use of the facilities provided. It seems that work and leisure were as distinct spheres in some miners' lives in the inter-war and war years as they were among the post-war affluent workers studied by Goldthorpe et. al. (115)

In general, housing, health, living standards and social amenities improved in the mining communities between the wars. The factual realities, however, were not always perceived as improvements by miners and their families. 'The council', for example, was often regarded as a worse landlord than a coalowner or squire. Moreover, as the mining communities became a focus of public concern (reflected in the implementation of the Miners' Welfare Scheme) the socio-psychological isolation of the mining population began to be eroded. It therefore became increasingly aware of the ambivalent status and image of miners in the wider

115. J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer & J. Platt, The Affluent Worker: industrial attitudes and behaviour (Cambridge 1968).

society. There might still have been admiration for the 'manly status' of the miner, doing a 'tough' job with considerable risks attached to it, but by the later 1940s few miners wanted to live in a place identified as a 'mining community'. A substantial minority of Scottish miners and housewives surveyed in 1946 were satisfied with their environment (chiefly on vague grounds of familiarity and the presence of friends and relatives in the neighbourhood) but the majority expressed a clear preference for the idea of living in a mixed occupational community. This preference was interpreted in the Social Survey report as suggesting, at best, that even miners and their wives who felt some attachment to the industry were nonetheless discontented with 'the social isolation which they have suffered' and consequently wished 'to move into the mainstream of social and economic life'. The report concluded, however, that what seemed even more likely was that most miners and their wives thought a mixed occupational community desirable because it might 'provide the means of final escape from the mining life'.(116)

116. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities (PRO), p.91.

Chapter Four

The Miners' Unions and the Labour Movement

The theme of community continues in this chapter but in the context of working class organisation in the coalfields. The unions, the Somerset Miners Association and the Mid and East Lothian Miners Association, provide a starting point. No attempt is made to fully describe union policy over the period or to give a detailed account of the disputes of the 1920s. The focus is on relationships between district and national unions, between the leadership and the membership and between the miners' unions and other key organisations. Some analysis of the strength of the SMA and MELMA is followed by comment on the national-local dimension before moving on to structure, organisation, leadership and the role of the agents. The effects of regional circumstances are then discussed with reference to MELMA's struggle against communism and to union attitudes to the unemployed, with the emphasis on the response of the SMA. Brief consideration is then given to links with the co-operative movement before, in conclusion, examining the relationship between the miners' unions and the Labour party at local level.

Formal trade unions were established in Somerset in 1872 and in the Lothians in 1887.⁽¹⁾ The SMA had a precarious existence until the late 1880s and thereafter it was not recognised at all collieries, while some miners (particularly those in the Newbury district of the coalfield) remained outside the union. A Radstock Conciliation Board was set up in 1900 but not all the employers

1. Somerset: Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.p.31-6; P.M. Bonsall, 'Masters and Men; a study of trade unionism, class and politics in the Somerset coalfield, 1890-1914' BA Hons dissertation (CNAAB) Bath CHE (1984); the Lothians: Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, p.p. 92-94.

acknowledged the Board and it operated usually in favour of the coalowners.⁽²⁾ Decisions made in support of the miners' claims were invariably ignored by owners and managers. MELMA, however, was recognised in a collective capacity by the employers in 1888, within a year of its formation. A Board of Conciliation was established in the Lothians in 1892 and MELMA was active in the formation of the Coal Conciliation Board of Scotland, which came into being in 1899. Throughout the inter-war period regular meetings were held between MELMA and the Lothian Coal Owners' Association, whereas in Somerset formal contacts between both sides of the industry had only an intermittent existence. Moreover, not all the owners belonged to the Somerset Coal Owners Association⁽³⁾ and in the aftermath of 1926 the SMA was so powerless in the workplace that the owners were able to treat it with a dismissive contempt more typical of employers' earlier attitudes to trade unions.

Between 1914 and 1919, with full employment in a war-based economy, membership of the MFGB increased by 128,00. Almost every district and county union showed a rapid rise in numbers and, across the country, there was a further upsurge of growth in the immediate post-war years, which raised the total membership of the MFGB to a peak figure of 955,000 at the beginning of 1921.⁽⁴⁾

2. On the development and impact of the conciliation movement see J.Porter, 'Wage Bargaining under Conciliation Agreements, 1860-1914', Ec.Hist. Rev., XXIII (1970), p.p.460-475; Bulletin SSLH, No 25 (Autumn 1972), p.62.

3. Above, p.35.

4. Cole, Labour in the Mining Industry 1914-1921, p.p. 64-5. As Cole points out, not all county unions included enlisted members in their total figures. See also R.P. Arnot, The Miners, Years of Struggle, passim.

Events later in 1921 and those of 1926 left the miners' unions weakened both numerically and financially, while in many coalfields challenges from left and right led to bitter factional struggles.⁽⁵⁾ National organisation barely survived in Scotland, where as early as 1922 the Union of Scottish Miners was drastically reduced in numbers and already under threat from the militant Reform Movement in the Fife coalfield. MFGB membership figures for March 1921 and for March 1923 in Table IV:I show a total fall of 22 per cent over the period. In Somerset the reduction was 23 per cent. Although separate figures are not available for the Lothians, across the Scottish coalfields as a whole membership was reduced by 27 per cent.

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5. R.P.Arnot, The History of the Scottish Miners (1953), p.p. 150-69. Events in the South Wales coalfield are covered in H. Francis and D.Smith, The Fed, a History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century (London,1980). See also 'Notes on Labour Statistics. "The Pulse of One Fraternity". Non-unionism in the Yorkshire Coalfield, 1931-38', Bulletin SSLH, 49 (Autumn 1984), p.p. 46-53.

TABLE IV:I

MFGB MEMBERSHIP, 1921 and 1923

MARCH, 1921		MARCH, 1923		
District	Number in March, 1921	Number in March, 1923	Reduction	Per cent Reduction
Bristol	2,200	1,900	500	14
Cleveland	9,450	2,000	7,450	79
Cokemen	9,800	4,200	5,600	57
Cumberland	13,500	8,500	5,000	37
Derbyshire	49,000	32,000	17,000	35
Durham	126,240	120,000	6,240	5
Enginemmen	20,200	15,512	4,688	23
Forest of Dean	6,000	1,500	4,500	75
Kent	2,000	1,400	600	30
Lancs. & Cheshire	90,000	65,000	25,000	28
Leicester	7,900	7,900	--	--
Midlands	64,000	60,000	4,000	6
Northumberland	41,500	37,152	4,348	10
North Wales	16,300	10,000	6,300	39
Nottingham	35,000	30,000	5,000	14
Scotland	110,000	80,000	30,000	27
Somerset	5,620	4,300	1,320	23
South Derby	6,400	5,600	800	13
South Wales	200,000	117,500	82,500	41
Yorkshire	142,500	140,000	2,500	2
TOTALS	957,610	744,464	213,146	22

NOTE: Figures of annual average numbers of wage earners in the mines of Somerset and the Lothians are available in the statistical tables of the Annual Reports of the Mines Inspectorate.

SOURCE: Annual Proceedings, MFGB (1923), p.102

After the defeat of 1926 it took the MFGB nearly a decade to rebuild its strength and to regain a bargaining position approaching that of the early 1920s. In 1920 the SMA claimed a membership of 7,000, an increase in numbers of 33 per cent since 1914.⁽⁶⁾ MELMA's membership stood officially at 11,276 in December 1924.⁽⁷⁾ A comparison of union figures with total

6. Cole op.cit. Another complicating factor with the figures is that most county and district unions counted boys under sixteen as half members.

7. Printed Minutes, MELMA (NLS), December 31, 1924.

labour force of 15,647 (excluding clerks and salaried persons) in the Lothians in the same year, suggests that organisation in the coalfield was over 70 per cent (72.0 per cent). In Somerset in 1923 the total workforce (excluding clerks and salaried persons) was 5,671⁽⁸⁾ with union membership at 4,300, or just under 76 per cent (75.8 per cent) of underground and surface wage earners. However it was sometimes in the interests of a union to inflate its membership figures (to legitimise its claims to represent the workforce, for example) although in other circumstances (such as calculating affiliation fees to national organisations, on the basis of numbers) it might suit the purpose of officials to minimise the size of their union. The level of organisation in the early 1920s is therefore suspect in both areas but especially so in the Lothians, as numbers pencilled in beside the figures in the published minutes of December 1924 give a substantially lower membership, of 7,960.⁽⁹⁾

Both unions were adversely affected by the industrial disputes of 1921 and 1926. At the end of 1921 only 3,500 Lothian miners were still paying their dues to MELMA, a figure that fell to 2,500 in 1922.⁽¹⁰⁾ From 1926 to 1939 MELMA continuously claimed a membership of 7,500 but a ballot vote of the membership at the end of 1932 recorded a total vote of 5,069.⁽¹¹⁾ Of course, not all members are likely to have voted but nonetheless the very consistency of the figures from 1926 to 1939 gives ground for scepticism. Moreover, although mounting unemployment,

8. Annual Reports of the Mines Inspectorate, Statistical Tables, 1923; 1924. See above, Table II:IV p.86.

9. Printed Minutes, MELMA, December 31 1924 (NLS).

10. Minute Books, MELMA, January 3, 1922.

11. Minute Books, MELMA (NLS), December 20, 1932.

disillusionment and general apathy weakened both the unions, MELMA faced an effective challenge from the militant United Mineworkers of Scotland which, in 1928, claimed a membership of 2,060 in the Lothian coalfields.(12)

In Somerset, Fred Swift publicly acknowledged that the SMA had been 'brought to its knees' by the end of 1926 but the inter-union conflict was here both less significant and more short lived. The "non-political" Somerset Miners Industrial Union seems to have been confined to a minority of miners among the workforce at one or at most two of Beauchamp's pits in the SCL group and the SMIU was reabsorbed into the SMA by the early 1930s, whereas the UMS retained a separate and hostile identity in Scotland until 1936. Fred Swift and the SMA pit representative at Norton Hill met colliery representatives of the SMIU 'at their request' in April 1930, to discuss the question of them rejoining the Association; by October of that year it was reported to the SMA council that only three men employed in Norton Hill were 'outside the organisation'.(13)

12. DEP /258 97), Misc. papers relating to UMS, Minority Movement and other groups (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh), press cutting, n.d, c.1927. See also Arnot, The Scottish Miners, p.p.150-169.

13. Minutes, SMA (BUL), April 11 1930, October 31, 1930. There is scant evidence about the SMIU, other than its appearance before the Guss Committee. Stanley Chivers, who worked at Norton Hill in the 1920s and 1930s, is adamant that no breakway existed there. The SMA certainly retained a presence in the SCL group but it seems likely that Beauchamp recognised only the SMIU until it was reabsorbed in 1928. The directors of Pensford and Bromley Collieries (1921) Ltd. were eager to see a 'non-political' union established in their pits but the managing director said that such an organisation would have no chance of success, because the men were loyal to the SMA and the Federation.

In both coalfields the unions devoted much time and effort to rebuilding their strength after 1926 but differences in regional circumstances dictated priorities and tactics. In Somerset the decline in employment in mining, the powerlessness of the SMA in the workplace, its total defeat over the wages issue, were all factors that disposed the union towards adopting an inclusive attitude to the unemployed, a high profile in the community and a commitment to raising living standards through constitutional means aimed at improving state-welfare provisions. In the Lothians, the general recruitment drive after 1926 focused on those collieries and areas where there was a communist presence, where the official union feared that it was in danger of losing out to the UMS. Thus, particularly close attention was given to the affairs of MELMA branches at Prestongrange and Prestonlinks. To further combat the influence of communism, leaflets were distributed to every house in Prestonpans 'so men would understand the nature of the organisation they were being asked to join'.⁽¹⁴⁾ Yet the UMS had relatively little support from Lothian miners. In February 1931 there were small branches at Musselburgh, Tranent, Newcraighall, Smeaton and Prestongrange but by then the Prestonlinks branch (and one at Wallyford) were apparently defunct.⁽¹⁵⁾

MELMA was, however, in the forefront of the county unions in the factional struggle at national level and much of its time was devoted to the affairs of the Scottish Mineworkers Union.

14. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), September 21, 1929.

15. Information supplied by A.B.Campbell, in his comments on a draft of the thesis.

It seems likely that both unions emerged from the inter-war ordeal in some ways stronger for their experiences. In 1931 Fred Swift confidently asserted that in Somerset 'they still had an organisation better than anywhere in the country'.⁽¹⁶⁾ With the total workforce diminished to some 3,000, Swift claimed that 70 per cent were members of the union. His claim is supported by a comparison of votes cast in an important district ballot in 1931⁽¹⁷⁾ with figures for average numbers employed in 1932.⁽¹⁸⁾ The 2,854 votes cast by SMA members equals 78.6 per cent of the total workforce of 3,627.

In the Lothians the interests of MELMA leaders and colliery managers coincided in response to the upsurge of militancy, particularly after 1926. Managers of several pits wrote to the county secretary with assurances that 'no effort would be spared' to make every miner join the Association.⁽¹⁹⁾ Such co-operation from management made some collieries virtually 'closed shops' in the Lothians by the mid 1930s. Meanwhile, the membership seems to have become increasingly disposed to the aggressive style of trade unionism promoted by the UMS and once that body was reabsorbed in 1936, MELMA adopted a less-conciliatory attitude over such issues as the contractor system and the working of overtime. Andrew Clarke (secretary of MELMA and President of the

16. Somerset Guardian, September 11, 1931.

17. Below, p.210. The ballot was on the question of altering election procedures and amending the constitution of the SMA. The underlying issue was whether or not unemployed miners should be allowed to stand for election for Union offices. The question aroused some controversy and it seems likely that the proportion of SMA members participating in the ballot was high.

18. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), Table XV B, p.37.

19. Minutes, MELMA(NLS), January 28, 1927.

National Scottish Union from 1933 to 1940) remained implacably hostile to Abe Moffat⁽²⁰⁾ and to other former leaders of the UMS but there were lessons to be learned from the breakaway. The comparatively low percentage of overtime and Sunday work in Mid and East Lothian in 1935 may well have owed more to the UMS factions than to the official union.⁽²¹⁾ Communism was, however, relatively insignificant in the Lothians compared to its influence in Fife or Lanarkshire. Apart from Edinburgh, there was no continuous Communist Party organisation in Midlothian although a local branch in Musselburgh had twenty three members in 1932. Membership in East Lothian was, according to internal Party documents, numerically small but quite persistent: fourteen in July 1930, twelve in May 1932.⁽²²⁾

While MELMA was deeply involved in national organisation, it was inevitably somewhat inward-looking in the period. Defending the union from communism in the Lothians and in Scotland as a whole was its priority. References in the minutes to the MFGB as 'the British Federation' suggests a certain remoteness from that body and, indeed, for long periods when MELMA was withholding dues from the national organisation it had technically no affiliation with the MFGB.⁽²³⁾ In Somerset too it was local issues and

20. The factional struggle from the perspective of the left wing militants is described in A. Moffat, My Life with the Miners (1965).

21. Dalkeith Advertiser, August 1, 1935.

22. Information supplied by A.B.Campbell in his comments on a draft of the thesis.

23. This applied for most of the period from 1928 to 1934-5.

loyalties that predominated. A general commitment to national organisation might be inferred from the relatively high sales of the MFGB newspaper, The Miner, in Somerset in 1929 and 1930⁽²⁴⁾ but within the loose structure of the Federation each district and county union had considerable autonomy, with its own funds and rules and the right to take independent action. Calls for the MFGB to be reorganised as a national union brought a negative response from the SMA leadership, who evidently felt that the interests of small districts like Somerset were often overlooked within the Federation as it existed and were likely to be completely disregarded if centralisation was increased. Events in 1936 may have weakened loyalty to the MFGB in Somerset. The owners tried to pre-empt a national wages claim (made in 1935) by posting notices at the collieries offering a small increase in local rates from January 1, 1936. The SMA responded to this ploy by writing to the SCOA to point out that the men had endorsed MFGB policy by ballot vote and 'there could be no district settlement of the matter without the authority of the Federation'.⁽²⁵⁾ To widespread disappointment in Somerset, a national conference of the MFGB subsequently recommended the acceptance of district offers as a concession to employers because the Mining Association of Great Britain had agreed to participate in a new conciliation body, the Joint National Committee. No Somerset owner joined that Committee and by publicly abandoning the long-held principle of national wage

24. Proceedings, MFGB, 1929-30, p. 1671. Total circulation of The Miner in Scotland in the week of August 6, 1930 was 1,934, considerably below the figure of 8,287 that the Federation estimated as necessary 'to pay our way'. The quota for the Somerset coalfield was 329 but more than double (733) this number of copies were sold in the week to which the figures relate.

25. Minutes, SMA (BUL), December 23, 1935.

agreements the MFGB conference decision effectively further undermined the already weak position of the SMA. In March 1936 the agent reluctantly recommended that efforts should be made to open negotiations 'for a purely district agreement as there did not seem any possibility of a national formula now being adopted'.(26)

At a local level there were significant differences in the structure and organisation of the unions, in the relationship between the leadership and the mass of membership and in the role of the agents. Moreover, regional variations in the scale of the industry and in the geographical spread of the mining communities had some influence on trade unionism. The SMA was organised on a pit-lodge system, with each lodge committee sending an elected representative to the district council from which the officials and executive were elected. Only the agent was elected by direct ballot of the membership. A branch system operated in the Lothians where elected delegates from the branches formed a district board, which elected the executive. Officials were elected annually by direct ballot. The agent was also elected by this method but not subject to annual re-election, although there were demands at times that agents should be elected tri-annually. It needs to be emphasised that a Lothian 'branch' was not necessarily synonymous with a Somerset lodge committee. Thus, the House O' Muir branch in Midlothian (with sixty one members in 1924) was colliery-based, like a lodge, but the Niddrie branch (with nearly 2,000 members) included several separate collieries each with a committee.(27)

26. *ibid*, March 24, 1936.

27. Cunningham, Mining in the Lothians, p.p.94-5.

Moreover, the Lothian branches had more autonomy, financial and otherwise than that of a Somerset lodge. They were allowed a 'local retained' portion of union dues which could be used at the discretion of the branch, whereas in Somerset all funds were sent directly to the central body. There was no regular, routine contact between agents or other officials and the Lothian branches, in marked contrast to Somerset where the agent attended every monthly lodge meeting to give a report on district matters. The system in the Lothians made it relatively easy for militant groups in such pits as Prestonlinks to take control of the branches. What is more, in conjunction with the size of the coalfield, it provided opportunities for militants to build power bases in individual pits, in ways similar to those associated with the shop steward movement in engineering.⁽²⁸⁾ In the small Somerset coalfield it was an easy matter for the agent to be quickly on the spot when any dispute arose but this was not always so in the Lothians. When the Rosewell miners elected a radical committee in 1933, the manager responded by promptly suspending two of its members and, over period of six days, sending back three others from several shifts. This provoked a mass walk-out but the pit had been on strike for four days before news of the dispute reached the secretary of MELMA, via the branch to which the Rosewell miners belonged. By the time the agent became involved the men were demanding more than the reinstatement of their committee. They flouted MELMA's authority by refusing to return to work under terms agreed between the agent and the manager and stayed out until their own terms (which

28. See J. Hinton, Labour and Socialism. A History of the British Labour Movement 1867/1974 (Brighton, 1983), p.p.93'

included immediate talks on the question of payment for all overtime) were accepted.⁽²⁹⁾ Furthermore, the scale of organisation in the Lothians engendered the same kind of impersonal relations within the union as those that existed in the workplace. Careful checks had to be made by branch officials when paying out strike funds in the Lothians because without written proofs they were often unsure of who did or did not belong to MELMA. Men claiming extra allowance for dependent children were routinely asked to produce a birth certificate to support their claims.

In Somerset the members' accessibility to the union was reinforced by social contacts in church or chapel, on the football field or at other venues. The fact that the SMA's offices were centrally located at Radstock was also important, for miners throughout the district were likely to be frequently in the urban centre of the coalfield - dropping in at the office for a word with Fred Swift could easily be combined with the weekly trip to the market, a visit to the cinema or some other outing to the town. MELMA, however, was much less an integral part of the society it served and it had a physical presence that was remote from the coalfield. The Lothian union owned a house and offices at Eskbank but executive and board meetings were regularly held in Edinburgh during the early part of the period, in rented rooms at the Free Gardeners' Institute in Picardy Place.⁽³⁰⁾ In 1922 MELMA

29. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), February 7, 1933.

30. The premises at Eskbank were considered too small for board and executive meetings but, for reasons of economy, they were used during the 1921 lockout.

purchased a property in Edinburgh at Hillside Crescent as a head office, letting out rooms to other labour organisation with preference being given to trade unions.⁽³¹⁾ The branches voted 17:3 in favour of the move but opposition to the union headquarters being located outside the coalfield underlay a motion that the main office should be in Musselburgh.⁽³²⁾ The motion found no seconder and a proposal from an East Lothian branch that at least one of the agents should live in the Tranent district was ruled out of order by the executive chairman.⁽³³⁾ It was in this part of the coalfield, the most remote from central office, that communist influence was at work⁽³⁴⁾ and where MELMA completely lost control of the rank and file in 1926. One of the most violent incidents of the dispute occurred at Tranent when a crowd attacked the local police with such ferocity that they were driven to take refuge in the police station. Windows were smashed and several policeman injured before assistance arrived from Haddington and elsewhere. The siege was raised only after prolonged fighting between the miners and police reinforcements.⁽³⁵⁾

Leadership in both areas was characterised by continuity and drawn from a core of trade unionists who were for the most part also activists in the ILP and Labour party. Many were associated with the co-operative movement.⁽³⁶⁾ Among the miners' leaders of

31. MELMA kept a 'flat' of eight rooms for its own use. This part of the building was made available to the Labour committee during general elections.

32. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), June 24, 1922.

33. *ibid*, June - July, 1922

34. Above, p.

35. The Times. May 6, 1926.

36. Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. II, relevant entries.

the 1920s, Fred Swift of the SMA was a moderate who consistently argued that strikes were an unnecessary and cruel way of settling industrial disputes. Andrew Clarke, of MELMA, was almost the first county official to publicly condemn MFGB policy in the 1921 lockout. Following the Federation's decision that even safety work must stop, volunteers manned the pumps and engine houses but were in many cases attacked by militant miners and prevented from working. The Scottish pits that were subsequently flooded included Polton colliery in Midlothian, where underground damage was so extensive that the Lothian Coal Company's general manager estimated that it would be at least six months after the dispute ended before the mine could be worked again.⁽³⁷⁾ Andrew Clarke did not hold 'the natives of Mid and East Lothian' responsible for the crowds of young men who smashed boiler houses and beat up blacklegs. Instead, he blamed MFGB policy which he claimed was:

alien to the counties. It was dictated from without. It is the same policy as that which Lenin now admits has ruined Russia.⁽³⁸⁾

Clarke's implacable hostility to communism was, however, also a reflection of the tensions that arose when an entrenched and conservative leadership was faced with a rising generation that was not necessarily communist but, nonetheless, more militant than the older generation. In Somerset, Fred Swift was seen as something of a rebel by his predecessor and his election as SMA agent in 1917 represented a swing to the left in a coalfield where trade unionism had been dominated by the Lib-Lab traditions of the 1870s and only slightly modified by the general growth of industrial militancy and political consciousness between the late 1880s and 1914. Other men of Swift's generation came to the fore

37. Edinburgh Evening News, June 2, 1921.

38. Dalkeith Advertiser, April 28, 1921.

in the SMA at much the same time, so the union emerged from the first World War with a more radical leadership. Moderate or even conservative in a national context, SMA leaders were widely regarded as 'left-wingers' in Somerset and neither their reputation or their position was challenged by a rising generation. Not only was juvenile recruitment almost at a standstill in the Somerset pits but mounting unemployment encouraged migration from the area and it is likely that young, unmarried men (at least some of them of a radical temperament) accounted for a substantial proportion of the 10 per cent of Norton Radstock's population lost through out-migration between 1921 and 1931.

The oligarchic leadership in Somerset, well in control of the district and somewhat further to the left than the membership, carried representative democracy to its limits and did not always consult the membership as fully as it might have done. In the confident years of 1919 and 1920 the SMA council passed numerous strongly-worded resolutions on topics ranging from intervention in Russia to consumer interests in Radstock, copies of which were sent off to the press, politicians and government ministers. Here, as elsewhere at local level,⁽³⁹⁾ there was no clear-cut divide between anti-war ILP members and pro-war trade unionists but ILP influence among the leadership accounts for a resolution passed in January 1919. This endorsed President Wilson's peace plan and declared the unfaltering opposition of the Somerset

39. J.A.Jowitt and K.Laybourn, 'War and Socialism: the experience of the Bradford Independent Labour Party 1914-1918', The Journal of Regional and Local Studies, Vol.4, No.2 (Autumn 1984), p.p.57-72.

Miners Association to any 'militarist and imperialist settlement'. Copies were duly dispatched to the press, the constituency MP, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and one to the American President himself.⁽⁴⁰⁾ However, not all the miners shared opinions expressed by the council and in July 1919 a pit delegate proposed that 'no resolution on Public or National questions should be dealt with by the Council without first the men being consulted'.⁽⁴¹⁾ The council simply deferred the motion and the issue was not reopened.

The MELMA board used similar tactics. Resolutions had to be submitted from the branches in writing at least a week before the board's monthly meeting, failing which they were held over to the following month. They might be blocked at the first stage on a procedural point or by a decision to take no action - few resolutions called for any positive action but nonetheless they took up an inordinate amount of union time, making up the bulk of the agenda at most meetings. The process of remitting board decisions to the executive for consideration, which then remitted its decision back to the board, which then sent it out to the branches - whereupon the whole process began again, in reverse - was extremely bureaucratic. Blocking resolutions from militant branches effectively stifled opposition within MELMA but it probably encouraged support for the UMS, because it frustrated attempts by radical elements to bring about change within the existing organisation. There was some justification for accusations that MELMA was little more than a 'talking shop' and

40. Minutes, SMA (BUL), January 11, 1919.

41. *ibid.*, July 19, 1919.

its bureaucratic methods slowed down the democratic process to such an extent that it was incapable of responding quickly to events, even when the leadership wished it to. In December 1919, for example, the executive recommended a donation to the Vienna Relief Fund but months elapsed as recommendations and decisions were remitted back and forth between executive, board and branches. It was April 1920 before MELMA's donation to the Fund was eventually sent off.⁽⁴²⁾

The role of the miners' agents was another point of contrast between the trade unions in the two coalfields. Fred Swift was a particularly powerful figure in the SMA and his influence on the union's policies was extensive. As the only full time official, he dealt with membership, correspondence, finance and disputes. He frequently appeared at tribunals to represent miners in benefit appeals and he dealt single-handed with all aspects of compensation cases.⁽⁴³⁾ Resolutions passed by the SMA and those sent to MFGB, TUC or other conferences in the period frequently originated in suggestions from the agent and the union's major campaigns were almost entirely due to his personal promotion of the issues. In the Lothians a full-time secretary, assisted by a typist, did much of the work that was Swift's responsibility in the SMA. The Lothian agent's powers were restricted to acting

42. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), December 1919 to April 1920.

43. Compensation was an important issue to the unions but it is not a topic dealt with in this study. The SMA archive (BUL) contains numerous compensation files but in the Lothians cases were initially considered by a subcommittee, whose minutes have not survived. Where a claim was considered justified cases were immediately handed over to a Law Agent in the Scottish coalfield.

under instruction from executive or board in disputes or matters relating to membership. Peter Chambers (elected as MELMA agent in 1919 by a substantial majority in a six-man contest⁽⁴⁴⁾) retained his position only in the face of frequent protests and complaints about him from the members and in the context of a somewhat difficult relationship with the leadership. The Elphinstone branch moved a vote of no confidence in the agent and demanded that he submit to re-election by ballot in December 1930, after he had failed to attend a Court of Referee's hearing in Edinburgh where an appeal for unemployment benefit went against the claimant. Chambers had been in London at the time. He had gone there to attend a conference but in a statement to the board he claimed that the morning after he arrived in the city he 'was unable to get out of bed owing to illness' and had remained in that condition until the following day, when he travelled back to Edinburgh. Before accepting this explanation, the board contacted the railway station in Edinburgh and the proprietor of the London hotel, to get confirmation of Chamber's account.⁽⁴⁵⁾ It seems that the Lothian agent was a man of volatile temper, for he was frequently involved in violent incidents - sometimes with fellow trade-unionists but also with the police. In 1921 he was imprisoned after scuffles on the picket line during the lockout. Moreover, as the visible representative of MELMA he was at times the focus of militant hostility towards the official union. In 1927, for example, he went to Prestonpans to represent MELMA at a

44. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), December 6, 1919.

45. *ibid.*, December 24, 1930.

meeting to be addressed by A.J. Cook. Arriving there in heavy rain and finding a large crowd of women and children waiting outside the Miners Institute, he asked the caretaker to open the hall and let people in. The caretaker refused, on the grounds that the Institute could only be opened when the branch committee turned up to give authorisation. Chambers thereupon made a forced entry into the building and in the ensuing fracas several benches were damaged. The Prestongrange branch subsequently demanded (and received) £2-10/- in compensation from central funds and the agent was known henceforth in the communist news-sheets as 'Brawling Pate'.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The inter-war conflict within the Scottish mining unions has been fully recorded elsewhere⁽⁴⁷⁾ and here it is sufficient to give only a summary of national events before considering the matter from a local perspective. Between 1919 and 1926 Scottish miners in general (and particularly those in Fife) moved ever further to the left and grew increasingly suspicious of what they perceived as the undemocratic methods whereby moderate leaders retained their positions. When the NUSMW executive accepted the owners' terms for a return to work in late November 1926, opposition to the existing leadership became acute and it found expression in a land-slide victory for left-wing militants in the post-settlement elections for the executive and officials of the national union. The entrenched leadership, however, nullified the

46. *ibid.*, October 19, 1927. 'Brawling Pate' was the term used for the agent in the Links Reflector. One of Cook's visits to the Somerset coalfield is reported in the Daily Herald, May 26, 1926.

47. Arnot, The Scottish Miners, p.p.150-69.

democratic process by repeatedly postponing the annual conference at which the election results should have been ratified. No conference was held until 1928 because the moderate county unions would not accept the right of those in arrears with their contributions (as most of the militant counties were) to attend. The militants' response was to form a Save the Union council, from which there ultimately emerged the United Mineworkers of Scotland. The intention of the UMS founders was that it should cater for all Scottish miners regardless of political persuasion but the UMS itself was affiliated to both the Communist Party of Great Britain and to the Third or 'Red' International of Labour Unions. From the beginning of 1933 onward, the UMS made repeated approaches to the NUSMW and to the county unions for joint action in general and on specific issues. Continually rebuffed and denied affiliation to the MFGB because of its communist sympathies, the organisation disbanded in 1936 and advised its members to rejoin the official unions.⁽⁴⁸⁾

MELMA took a key role in excluding the left from the NUSMW and Lothian officials dominated the national organisation after 1928, with David Pryde and Andrew Clarke serving as vice presidents at times and Clarke as president from 1933 until his death in 1940. Prior to the 1928 conference, the opinion of MELMA officials was that the only alternative to firmly re-establishing the NUSMW as a moderate body was that MELMA should entirely withdraw from national organisation.⁽⁴⁹⁾ It seems highly likely that this is

48. *ibid.*

49. Minutes, MELMA (NLS) October 20, 1928.

what the county union would have done if the left had triumphed for it was deeply suspicious of militancy in places like Fife.

A deputation from Fife was received by the Lothian board in late 1928, for discussions over MELMA officials campaigning in Fifeshire for 'moderation' or - as it appeared to the Fife secretary, Philip Hodges - attempting to get 'a Spencer union' formed there.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The meeting was intended to reduce tension between the two unions but any hope of reconciliation was dashed when one of the delegates from Fife 'openly said he was an active member of the Communist Party and admitted that their avowed policy was to replace the Present Industrial and Political Leaders by those who were avowed members of the Communist Party'(sic). The meeting ended in disarray and MELMA publicly disassociated itself from all representatives of the Fifeshire Mining Association.⁽⁵¹⁾ News of a likely split in national organisation reached MELMA in April 1929, when it was reported to the executive that 'an outside body' was circulating the branches asking for delegates to a conference on the question of forming a new union. It was decided that any branch official who attended must be reported to the board, 'with a view to suspension'.⁽⁵²⁾

50. 'Spencerism', see A.R. Griffin, Mining in the East Midlands 1550-1941 (1971), 'Chapter V, 'Spencerism', p.p. 302-15.

51. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), November 21, 1928.

52. *ibid.*, April 9, 1929.

The chairman of the Save the Union Conference (held in Glasgow on April 13, 1929) emphasised that its aim was not to set up a rival organisation but 'to rescue the union from the clutches of the present leaders and so make it an effective weapon to fight for the better conditions of the mineworkers'.⁽⁵³⁾ The theme was reiterated in UMS recruiting literature, in which it was claimed that 'the "old gang" leadership of these County Unions are solidly with the owners and solidly against the interests of the men'. In the same leaflet the UMS also cleverly if inconsistently condemned the friendly society aspect of the official unions but went on to imply that the new union was a better organisation in this respect as well: 'All the County Unions are heavily in debt, are on the verge of financial bankruptcy, and on the point of closing down.... those joining the UMS have nothing to fear on the score of benefits.'⁽⁵⁴⁾

James Storie, Prestonlinks' delegate to the MELMA board in 1925-29, ignored the threat of suspension and attended the Glasgow conference accompanied by James Winter, as representative of Prestongrange men.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The Prestongrange branch delegate to MELMA in 1925, Thomas Quinn, had joined the communists sometime in the late 1920s but by 1930 he was back in the official union and had become the target of abuse in the Links Reflector, self-proclaimed 'Organ of the Prestonlinks Communist Cell':

This week's star turn is Thomas Quinn, ex-communist renegade, ex-Parish Councillor etc. He is the brains of the local "old gang" and has an understanding of our policy, which has for its objective the improvement of the workers' conditions.⁽⁵⁶⁾

53. DEP/ 258(7) (NLS), press cutting, n.d., c. April 1929.

54. Acc. 4825, Misc. news sheets, The Links Reflector, September 6, 1930.

55. DEP/258(7) (NLS), press cutting, n.d., c. April 1929.

56. The Links Reflector, September 6, 1930.

Urging 'Links Men' to recognise that supporting those with Quinn's attitudes was against their interests, the anonymous author added that 'only individuals who are prepared to fight the boss are entitled to support'.

From 1927 the secretary and agent of MELMA took a close interest in the activities of the Prestonlinks and Prestongrange branches. In addition to distributing anti-communist propaganda throughout Prestonpans, MELMA also organised door-to-door canvassing in Summerlee Street and the rest of the Cuthill area, to enroll 'lapsed' members.⁽⁵⁷⁾ At Prestonlinks the moderates had regained control of the branch by mid-1928 but communist activists were still causing 'some difficulty' at Prestongrange in the spring of 1929. In the early days of its existence, membership of the UMS did not automatically exclude a miner from office in MELMA and communists at Prestongrange took advantage of this to frustrate initial attempts to 'reorganise' the branch. UMS members attended branch meetings called by MELMA and forced them to be adjourned by refusing to leave, even when the meeting voted that they should. This prolonged the struggle for a while but MELMA expediently abandoned its democratic practice of balloting the members before changing its policies and decided that no member of the Communist Party, the Minority Movement or the UMS could take any official part in branch committees or in the district Association.⁽⁵⁸⁾ By September 1929 the agent was able to report that MELMA was 'in control again' at Prestongrange.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Controlling the branches, however, was easier than curtailing the

57. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), October 12, 1927.

58. *ibid.*, September 9, 1929.

59. *ibid.*, September 21, 1929.

activities of industrially militant miners in the pits, where numerous local disputes and a good deal of unofficial action were features of the period - especially from 1927 to the mid 1930s. A short unofficial strike at Niddrie colliery, for example, in January 1934 was attributed to communist agitators and there were said to be 'communist attempts' to spread the strike to nearby Woolmet colliery.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The communist presence in the Lothian pits and the frequency of local disputes in comparison to Somerset justify describing the Lothians as a more militant coalfield than Somerset, even though it was a moderate area in the context of the Scottish coalfields as a whole.⁽⁶¹⁾ Miners 'militancy', equated with 'strike-proneness', has long been recognised as a regional feature of the coal industry but as Church et. al. have noted no satisfactory explanation for regional or intra-regional variations has yet been offered.⁽⁶²⁾ The problem of the limited coverage of the official data (as identified by Church et. al.) is reflected in the figures for local strikes in Somerset and the Lothians between the wars. Only three local strikes were recorded in the Somerset coalfield over the period 1919 to 1939 (compared with 68 in the Lothians),⁽⁶³⁾ even though the union minute books and newspaper reports provide evidence of other industrial action at various times, affecting one or more collieries. Small-scale disputes were the dominant form of conflict in Somerset (as may have been the case in the other apparently quiescent areas such

60. *ibid.*, January 10, 1934.

61. Above, p.

62. Roy Church, Quentin Outram and David A. Smith, 'Essays in Historiography. Towards a history of British miners' militancy', *Bulletin SSLH*, Vol.54, Pt.I(1989), p.p.21-36.

63. Record books, mss-labour disputes (PRO), LAB 34(37-54).

as Lancashire and parts of the Midlands) but in Somerset as elsewhere it seems likely that some strikes that satisfied the criteria for inclusion in the official data were not actually recorded.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Similarly, the inclusion of small-scale strikes in the data on the Lothians would undoubtedly present a more 'strike-prone' profile than that revealed by the available figures.

TABLE IV:II
LOCAL DISPUTES IN THE
LOTHIAN COAL INDUSTRY, 1919-1939.

1919-1929		1930-1939	
YEAR	NO. OF DISPUTES	YEAR	NO. OF DISPUTES
1919	--	1930	4
1920	--	1931	--
1921	3	1932	1
1922	3	1933	3
1923	3	1934	8
1924	--	1935	2
1925	5	1936	4
1926	--	1937	13
1927	3	1938	3
1928	--	1939	11
1929	2	TOTAL (1919-1939)	
		68	

SOURCE: Record Books Mss., Labour Disputes, LAB (PRO). 34/37-54.

64. Notably the Radstock Collieries strike in February 1920. Since 1897 small strikes involving less than ten workers and those lasting less than a day (excepting those in which the aggregate number of days 'lost' is more than 100) have been consistently excluded from published data and from the Mss. Record Books of industrial disputes.

Furthermore, strike data in isolation does not explain militancy even where the records give an ostensible 'cause' for industrial action. As Church et. al. acknowledge, local case studies can provide valuable insights into the origins of industrial conflicts and may sometimes show that strike-proneness is rooted in conflict between miners, rather than between capital and labour. Causes given in the records for local disputes in the Lothians between the wars are various but they include 'refusal to work with non-unionists' in six cases.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The term 'non-unionist' was used in the MELMA minute books both literally (applied to men who belonged to no organisation) and as a euphemism for members of the breakaway UMS. It therefore seems that motives for strike action against non-unionists are open to interpretation and that such action should not necessarily be seen as an expression of 'militancy'. Attempts to force the unorganised into the official union were probably inspired by the hope of strengthening MELMA's bargaining position but in cases where the action was prompted by the presence in a pit of a communist element motives were perhaps more complex. If miners went on strike to compel UMS members to re-join MELMA they were surely being 'militant' only in the cause of moderation. What is more, given the enthusiasm of Lothian colliery managers for MELMA in preference to the UMS,⁽⁶⁶⁾ colliery-based disputes of short duration aimed at reabsorbing militant groups into the disciplined structure of the official union could arguably be seen as examples of collusion. It perhaps served the purposes of

65. With the exception of a short dispute at Arniston Colliery in September 1925, strikes over this issue all occurred in the years 1931 to 1936. Non-unionists were usually (as at Roslin Colliery in October 1936) given the choice of either joining the union or 'to discontinue working at the colliery'

66. Above, p.186.

colliery managers and of the official union to go through the motions of a short strike, if both sides could bear the costs with equanimity and foresaw long-term gains as worthwhile recompense for any short-term financial losses.

Fear of communism may well have influenced miners' industrial action and it was certainly a major influence on MELMA policies towards the unemployed. Unemployment⁽⁶⁷⁾ tended to be a short term problem in the Lothians (in the aftermath of disputes or in association with pit closures) but it could involve substantial numbers. Between 3,000 and 4,000 men lost their jobs in November 1927 when the collieries at Elphinstone and Penston closed down. Apprehension over the likelihood of communism gaining ground in this part of East Lothian, with unemployment being so widespread there, prompted the MELMA executive to resolve that 'every effort should be made to keep in touch with our members in Tranent'.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The union refused to associate itself in any way with the National Unemployed Workers Movement⁽⁶⁹⁾ and urged its members that their best interests would be served by adhering to their own organisation. Subject to certain unspecified 'safeguards' unemployed miners were entitled to 'full rights and benefits' in

67. On March 30, 1929 the president of MELMA told the board that out of 1700 registered unemployed in Mid and East Lothian the number of miners did not exceed 500.

68. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), December 31, 1927; January 11, 1928. It seems that the two pits were only temporarily closed as references were made to them perhaps re-opening in the New Year.

69. See J. Stevenson and C. Cook, The Slump. Society and Politics during the Depression (London 1977), chapter 9, on the origins of the NUWM. For a critical approach to the attitude of the official labour movement see R. Hayburn, 'The National Unemployed Worker's Movement, 1921-36. A Re-appraisal', International Review of Social History (1983), p.p. 279-95.

return for a weekly contribution of 2d. Advice on benefits was available through the branches and the secretary and agent were empowered to appear at tribunals when necessary. As one example of "the miners for the miners" and, what is more, to the exclusion of those from elsewhere, the MELMA executive approached the Coal Owners Association and the labour exchanges in Edinburgh to try to ensure that priority would be given to men from Mid and East Lothian for any vacancies in the Lothian collieries.(70)

At national level, the limited response of the Labour party and of the TUC to the problem of the unemployed owed much to the deep concern of the official labour movement over the threat of "entryism" from the Communist party. Attempts to mobilise discontent and provide leadership came mainly from unofficial groups such as the National Unemployed Workers Movement (founded in 1921 and not disbanded until after the outbreak of the second World War), the National Minority Movement and the Rank and File Movement. The overt or covert links of these organisations with the Communist party guaranteed that they were widely regarded with suspicion in the labour movement. However, by the early 1930s the TUC General Council had decided that some official leadership should be provided and it recommended Trades Councils as the most appropriate bodies to organise the unemployed. Letters to the SMA about this from the TUC and also from the MFGB were not responded to, because it had been an integral part of

70. In 1926, at the end of the dispute in the coal industry, the Mining Association of Great Britain gave an undertaking to the Ministry of Labour that the entry of adults to the industry would be limited to ensure that 'genuine unemployed mineworkers' had preference over others. Proceedings MFGB (1934), p.32.

union policy to organise the unemployed in the Somerset coalfield since the early 1920s. A full contribution of 6d. per week was paid to the SMA by out-of-work miners who found temporary employment, until 1930. In that year the council decided that as the debts accruing from the disputes of the 1920s had at last been paid off, the unemployed subscription should not exceed 1d. per week even from men in temporary work. Moreover, the annual council conference of 1930 voted in favour of a resolution that the SMA would admit 'unemployed workmen other than mineworkers' to limited membership.⁽⁷¹⁾ There is no evidence in the minutes or elsewhere as to how many non-miners were admitted to limited SMA membership but the long tradition of support from the Somerset miners for other occupational groups makes it at least likely that this resolution was not merely an empty gesture. From the late nineteenth century onwards miners were frequently levied to support boot and shoe workers in dispute, on short-time or out of work, as well as in aid of members of the SMA. Moreover, in the aftermath of the 1921 lockout (when over 1,700 miners were unemployed), the SMA did not pay a grant from the MFGB directly into union funds. Half of the unknown sum was donated to the District Relief Committee, which was relieving the dependents of boot and shoe workers on short time and those of all wholly unemployed men, whatever their occupation.

The SMA organised the unemployed into informal 'lodges' based at Radstock, Clutton and elsewhere, each group with its own collector and with the right to submit resolutions to the SMA council, although they did not have direct representation at

71. Minute Books, SMA (BUL), July 25, 1930; October 31, 1930. It is not clear what, if any, benefits were paid to such members.

district level. The tactics of these groups were close to those of the communist NUWM and included 'sit-ins' and disruption of meetings of the Clutton Board of Guardians as well as threats to invade the workhouse by single miners not entitled to out-relief.⁽⁷²⁾ Indeed, there is evidence of personal links between labour activists in the Somerset coalfield and the communist organisation. Doris Young (a keen worker for the Labour party and wife of a prominent left-wing miner) acted as unpaid secretary to the leaders of the Welsh miners' hunger march to London in 1936, walking with them all the way from Bristol. Among the leaders elected by the marchers at Cardiff was D.R.Llewellyn, who later fought with the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.⁽⁷³⁾ (Sometime after 1940, Llewellyn left Wales to work in the Somerset pits and in 1944 this former communist, now safely back in the Labour party, was elected as agent to the SMA on Swift's retirement).⁽⁷⁴⁾

Enrolling the unemployed in the SMA was one way of keeping up the numbers as employment in mining declined but keeping the leadership more or less intact was also a priority. Able men such as Walter Beard were lost to the union when they took jobs in other industries, as Beard did in 1923. Under Rule 4 of the

72. Records of the Clutton Board of Guardians are held at SRO, accession D/G/CL. Minute books 1927-30, D/G/CL 8(a)/44 but the deposit includes Master's Reports, Medical examinations of children etc. in the period and D/G/CL 146/12, Ledger, Relief on Loan, Repayments 1928-9. See J. Stevens, 'The Coalmining Lockout of 1926, with particular reference to the Co-operative Movement and the Poor Law', Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield 1984, especially chapter two, 'Poor Law Administration during the Lockout', p.p.40-62.

73. Francis and Smith, The Fed, p.272. I am grateful to Julian Rutter for information on Doris Young's role in the march. For a general study of the topic see P. Kingsford, 'The Hunger Marchers in Britain, 1920-39' (1982).

74. Below, p.290, f.n.43.

constitution all SMA officials had to be 'employed in or about the collieries' but as more and more officials were thrown out of work (especially after the resumption of work in November 1926)⁽⁷⁵⁾ this rule was disregarded. There was, however, a conservative element among the Somerset miners which had been critical (in the press) of the leadership throughout the disputes of the 1920s. Moreover, towards the end of the 1926 dispute Sir Frank Beauchamp had invited representatives from his collieries to a private meeting at his home, ostensibly to discuss the possibility of a Company settlement. From this meeting there emerged the Somerset Miners Industrial Union, in effect a company union confined apparently to Norton Hill and perhaps also Braysdown colliery in the SCL group. The SMIU was reabsorbed into the official union by the end of 1928 but thereafter the moderate lodges repeatedly called for officials to be elected by ballot vote of the membership, instead of by the district council. Braysdown lodge was the chief instigator of demands for changes in electoral procedure and in 1931 it submitted a resolution to this effect to the annual conference of pit lodges, with a second resolution 'that Rule 4 be adhered to'. The district was subsequently balloted and voted 2,146 : 707 against the annual election by ballot of officials and 1814 : 1040 against a rigid enforcement of Rule 4.⁽⁷⁶⁾ All nominations for pit representatives made for that year were therefore accepted even in cases where a nominee was unemployed but the council decided

75. The minute books suggest that victimisation of trade union activists was commonplace. The MELMA president was said to have been a particular target in the aftermath of the 1921 lockout. For Somerset, post-1926 dispute, see below, p.p.211-12 and p.251.

76. Minutes, SMA (BUL), July 31, 1931.

that before the next annual conference a further ballot on the question of formally amending the constitution must be held. Protest continued from Braysdown lodge, countered by resolutions in favour of the rights of the unemployed and a request from Radstock Unemployed Group for direct representation on the council, which was not granted. W. J. Bourne, the Kilmersdon delegate, spoke strongly in favour of union policy on one occasion but when 'the question arose as to whether [his views] actually emanated from the Kilmersdon pit men' he admitted that he had not canvassed opinion in the pit. As their elected representative he explained that he 'did not understand that it was necessary' to consult the men.⁽⁷⁷⁾

How many SMA officials were unemployed at any time or for what duration cannot be fully ascertained but figures are available for January 1927, when 582 members had still not been taken back after the return to work in November 1926. The figure may represent a high point (because of post-settlement victimisation) but it included the financial secretary of the SMA, ten of the fifteen pit representatives to the district council and 'a good many' members of lodge committees.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Most of the checkweighmen were also unemployed. The Braysdown representative was taken back for six months or so but then sacked in October 1927 'owing to the alleged discharging of hands, although he was the only one discharged'.⁽⁷⁹⁾ It seems unlikely that unemployed officials of the SMA would have been acceptable to the owners, particularly Beauchamp. Indeed, in May 1928 (after eight months of negotiation

77. *ibid.*, May 28, 1932.

78. *ibid.*, January 12, 1927.

79. *ibid.*, November 11, 1927.

over a minimum rate for the district) when it came to signing the terms 'dictated by the owners and accepted by the men under duress', as Swift put it,⁽⁸⁰⁾ the owners refused to accept the signatures of three SMA representatives. One of these was unemployed and the other two were checkweighers (technically employed by the miners) and the owners would only agree to sign if men 'in the employ of the owners' signed on behalf of the men.⁽⁸¹⁾

Despite the cavalier attitude of the Kilmersdon delegate in not consulting his members, there was evidently wide support for SMA policy. The next ballot went 1,116 : 856 in favour of amending Rule 4.⁽⁸²⁾ The result brought a furore of protest from Braysdown and Norton Hill lodges, where the strength of the opposition was reflected in the form of highly critical resolutions condemning the SMA council. The protest from Norton Hill specifically attacked the agent for not having discussed the issue with each lodge committee and it contained a threat to split the union again, by ceasing to contribute to the SMA if the rules were changed. It did however conclude with an added note: 'We do not ask to be placed into such a position'⁽⁸³⁾ and the union survived this onslaught from only two of the thirteen lodges. Fred Swift insisted that the issue had been 'magnified beyond its importance'⁽⁸⁴⁾ but it had created an unusual situation. From July 1932 the rights of the unemployed miner were officially equal to those of the employed members of the SMA.

80. Somerset Guardian, May 15, 1928.

81. Minutes, SMA (BUL), May 1928.

82. *ibid.*, June 17, 1932 (on a lower total vote than in 1931).

83. *ibid.*, June 24, 1932.

84. *ibid.*

There were collieries in the coalfield where the pit representative was an unemployed miner, although the amendment merely ratified existing circumstances.

The figures in Table IV :III show considerable variation from pit to pit in support and opposition to the amendment and even in the SCL group there was no overall consistency. At four of Beauchamp's pits (Ludlows, Middle Pit, Braysdown and Norton Hill) the vote went against the change but at Camerton the men were in favour. However, taking SCL employees as a whole, out of a total 640 miners opinion was sharply divided: 336 were against and 304 in favour, giving a majority of 32 opposed to the policy.

TABLE IV:III
RESULTS OF THE BALLOT TO AMEND RULE 4
OF THE S.M.A. CONSTITUTION, 1932.

LODGE	FOR	AGAINST
Ludlows	68	75
Middle pit	26	101
Mells	68	14
Moorewood	30	10
New Rock	67	17
Old Mills Springfield	115	53
Braysdown	37	172
Norton Hill	62	199
Camerton	111	93
Writhlington	137	61
Kilmersdon	88	28
Pensford	144	30
Bromley	163	3
Total	<u>1116</u>	<u>856</u>

SOURCE: SMA Minute Books, June 17, 1932, (BUL)

The results of the ballot suggest that inclusive attitudes towards the unemployed were quite widespread among most Somerset miners. Further evidence for this can be deduced from the miners response to circumstances at the end of the 1921 lockout. Even before that dispute, short-time and unemployment were causing concern. In February 1921 1,260 miners were working only one or two shifts and 290 were unemployed. Fred Swift called for a levy of 6d per shift, urging the miners that:

If the unemployed in our ranks...are not succoured by the aid that you are called upon to render, the position of all will be undermined and, further, let it be remembered that the employed of today may be the unemployed of tomorrow... let not one member be lacking in response to this appeal.⁽⁸⁵⁾

Only 'one or two' objections were recorded and over four weeks the levy raised £2,066..1..10d which was distributed to the unemployed with an allowance in proportion to those on short time. Later in 1921, with nearly 1,500 men still out after the settlement,^{the} levies were increased to 1/- for three shifts, 2/- for four and 3/- for five or six. The response was again good but the income of some £360 per week was persistently exceeded by £40 to £50 expenditure. Burdened with debts from the dispute, faced with mounting unemployment and an increase in short-time among those who were in work, the SMA was forced by financial circumstances to limit its support to periods of nine weeks. The Union's inability to maintain its members as it had in the past was a further incentive to seek improvements in living standards by campaigning for higher welfare benefits and poor relief. Nonetheless, the levies had been loyally paid. There was a very different response in the Lothians.

85. *ibid.*, February 1921.

In that coalfield (in June 1921), the MELMA board called for a levy of 6d per shift worked to pay off soup-kitchen debts and to relieve the 'dire need' of men not started back. With the exception of the Newbattle delegate, it was unanimously decided that the levy should be deducted at source by colliery offices 'to ensure that everyone working would pay'.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Three of the nineteen branches voted against the levy. The owners refused to deduct it at source and the response from those in work was 'disappointing'. At the end of July the secretary reported that the scheme

was anything but satisfactory as for the the first two weeks the total only amounted to £444.11.2d. A large number of the Branches had not contributed anything...⁽⁸⁷⁾

When the executive met in early August it was decided that as 'so few of the members were really paying as decided upon', the levy would be dropped and the branches asked to take up a weekly collection for the unemployed, to be disbursed 'where most needed' by the executive.⁽⁸⁸⁾ This was even more disappointing: 'with the exception of Wallyford Branch, none of the others forwarded any money to assist the members who are unemployed'.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Appeals for greater efforts and publicity over the plight of those out of work were ineffective and 'only a few pounds' came in from voluntary collections in early September.⁽⁹⁰⁾ At the end of that month, attempts to give general assistance were abandoned although special claims could be submitted individually to be judged on their merits. Another influence on this decision was the fact that from September 1921

86. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), June 30 1921.

87. *ibid.*, July 30, 1921.

88. *ibid.*, August 5, 1921.

89. *ibid.*, August 15, 1921.

90. *ibid.*, September 2, 1921.

Scottish parish councils were legally required to relieve the able-bodied unemployed.⁽⁹¹⁾ An application from Polton and Wallyford branches for special grants was turned down in mid-October on the grounds that any allocation would 'only cause the Parish Councils to reduce the amounts that they were entitled to pay under instructions given them by the Ministry of Health'.⁽⁹²⁾ However, MELMA officials' explanations that the miners' response to the call for levies was attributable to low wages, short time working and personal financial circumstances after the lockout do not explain the regional variations in 1921. Circumstances in Somerset were, in every way, worse than in the Lothians. Yet Somerset miners contributed nearly £1,500 (£1,440 on average) per month over a three month period, whereas Lothian men donated less than £700 in the same period. Loyalty to the union and attitudes to the unemployed are both a part of the explanation for this marked contrast but here again differences of scale between the industries and communities in the two coalfields were influential, as were regional variations in the level of unemployment.

The SMA's membership of 6,094 in 1921 represented a high proportion of the total workforce and nearly a quarter (24.7 per cent)⁽⁹³⁾ were out of work in the post-settlement months. In the small pits of Somerset their absence from the workplace was likely to be noticed while in the communities there would have

91. On the Scottish Poor Law see A.A. Cormack, Poor Relief in Scotland (Aberdeen 1923); I. Levitt, 'The Scottish Poor Law and Unemployment, 1890- 1929' in T.C. Smout (ed), The Search for Wealth and Stability. Essays in Economic and Social History Presented to M.W. Flynn (1979), p.p. 263-82; W.E. Whyte, Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1929 (Edinburgh 1929).

92. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), October 14, 1921.

93. Above, Table IV:I, p.182 and p.208.

been few miners who did not have some family, friends or neighbours directly affected by unemployment. The unemployed were less visible in the Lothians. The thirty-four unemployed members of the Arniston branch at this time were probably barely missed except by immediate workmates in a colliery workforce of over 1,000 and the men would have been only a small minority in the population of Arniston company village.

Unemployment may well have provoked a different response from the SMA had the union not been comprehensively defeated over the wages issue and more or less ignored by the owners after 1926. Distress committees were in existence for much of the inter-war period. Charities (such as Save the Children) and the Society of Friends were active in the coalfield and Clutton was officially designated a 'neccessitous Union' for most of the 1920s. Four work relief schemes were underway in the district in the winter of 1930-31.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Yet the coalfield was never identified as a 'distressed area' and it did not even rate a mention in the Unemployment Assistance Board (Bristol District) annual report for 1935.⁽⁹⁵⁾ A decline in employment of some 50 per cent in the mining industry was offset by some out migration and movement

94. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1930-31, [248], 615-16.

95. Cmd 5177 (1936) Annual Report, Unemployment Assistance Board (Bristol District) 1935 p.p.116-23. References to Unemployment in the Scottish coalfields can be found in numerous official sources e.g. Cmd 4728, XIII, 3123, Report of Investigations into the Industrial Conditions and Problems of Industrial Dereliction in Certain Depressed Areas (Edinburgh 1933-4); Cmd 5604, Report of the Commission for the Special Areas, Scotland (Edinburgh 1937), II, 23 and 26. Surveys of unemployment can be found in the miscellaneous sections of the Annual Reports of the Scottish Board of Health. See also Pilgrim Trust Report, Men Without Work (Cambridge 1938)

into other industries. The long term unemployed represented a relatively small core of mainly elderly men and their numbers were fairly constant over the decade 1923 to 1933.

TABLE IV:IV

NUMBER OF PERSONS REGISTERED AS UNEMPLOYED IN SOMERSET IN JUNE,
(VARIOUS YEARS AND SELECTED INDUSTRIES) 1923-1933.

INDUSTRY	1923	1926	1929	1932	1933
BUILDING	817	804	1019	3281	2766
COALMINING	566	461	643	581	434
PRINTING	126	505	116	724	450

Source: W.Glynn Morgan, 'The Mobility of Labour in the Principle Industries of Somerset 1923-33(MA, Univ. Coll. Wales 1934)

Note: Glynn Morgan's figures were taken from records of returns to employment exchanges throughout the county.

The SMA, in urgent need of some means of demonstrating its continued relevance to the miners' lives, shrewdly turned to high-profile campaigns over working conditions and to organising the unemployed. The guss campaign had its origins in the 1926 dispute although its use had aroused controversy since the early twentieth century, centred on the question of whether or not it was detrimental to health. A spate of letters was sent to the Somerset Guardian on the topic in 1926. Most of them were written in a partisan spirit drawing attention to the sufferings of the carting boys, with many graphic descriptions of raw and bleeding bodies. Fred Swift (who had been a carting boy for ten years) condemned the guss at every rally and was enthusiastically

applauded when he appealed to a mass meeting at Paulton to 'keep their lads out of the pit and away from this torture'.⁽⁹⁶⁾ A chance to publicise the issue beyond the coalfield came when the Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson visited Somerset to investigate conditions before speaking at a mass meeting at the Albert Hall in May 1926, in support of the miners. The local activist A.J. Parfitt set out for London two days before the rally on his bicycle, armed with a guss and crook, which was displayed to the audience at the Albert Hall rally.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Ellen Wilkinson subsequently made several speeches in the Commons, producing a guss on the floor of the House on one occasion, and she further publicised the campaign in articles written for the Daily Herald and Lansbury's Labour Weekly.

Meanwhile the agent amassed evidence on non-fatal accidents and injuries associated with the use of the guss and lobbied the MFGB for support. In April 1927 the MFGB applied to the Ministry of Labour for an inquiry and when the request was granted a Departmental Committee was set up. The SMA's main complaint to the investigating committee was that the guss imposed indignity on the wearer : 'It savours of the methods of a hundred years ago; being harnessed and crawling on hands and knees is not consistent with the dignity of labour - it is repulsive to modern ideas'.⁽⁹⁸⁾ However, the Conservative MP for Frome claimed that there was no support for its abolition, while the chairman of the Somerset Miners Industrial Union dismissed objections as 'largely a matter of propaganda and sentiment'.⁽⁹⁹⁾ These views were

96. Somerset Guardian, May 24, 1926.

97. Parfitt, Life as a Somerset Miner, p.47

98. Report of the Guss Committee, paragraph 50.

99. *ibid.*, p. 27.

partly vindicated when none of the carters interviewed by the Guss Committee actually expressed any grievances over the device, although this response might have been influenced by fear of provoking the wrath of colliery managers. The Committee's report acknowledged that some miners and sections of the public felt a 'strong repugnance' to the guss and although it was not found to be detrimental to health, modifications were recommended. At collieries where attempts were made to carry out these recommendations, the workforce proved somewhat reluctant to accept change. Substitute leather belts or cotton rope, to replace the customary tarred hemp, were soon discarded as being more uncomfortable to wear than the usual material. Wheeled putts reduced effort in places but the frequency with which they "jammed" into soft parts of the floor made them unpopular. The head Deputy of Kilmersdon reported to the manager in 1928 that thirty-four boys had discarded the guss and another thirty had partially abandoned it but he added:

they still cling to the Guss and find it useful...there are some - as you said the other day - would want to take it to Heaven with them, if they were going. As you know, men cling to old fashions and habits, so I have found it with the Guss. I have in many instances had to use persuasion to get them to adopt the wheel-putt. I have isolated cases which have resented the idea of changing the system, maintaining that the Somerset Coalfield cannot be worked without the use of the Guss. (100)

The campaign was a failure in that haulage methods remained largely unchanged throughout the period but it undoubtedly provided a useful diversion for militant members of the SMA during 1926 and 1927, some of whom were sent off to various parts of the country on 'propaganda' missions. The silicosis campaign

100. *ibid.*, para. 75-76.

was, as we have seen, ultimately successful⁽¹⁰¹⁾ but in the short term the policy of organising and assisting the unemployed was probably of greater significance in maintaining general loyalty to the union.

Support for the miners at times of industrial crisis came from all parts of the labour movement, from many of the general public and from numerous charitable bodies. At a local level the co-operative societies were often key institutions. There were wide inter-regional differences in the amount and kind of aid that the societies gave to the miners in dispute during the 1920s⁽¹⁰²⁾ and in this respect Somerset and the Lothians again offer a contrast in experience. The co-operative movement was well-established in both coalfields and still expanding, with eight new stores opened in the Somerset coalfield just before 1914 and the Tranent Co-op in the Lothians building a large creamery in 1924.⁽¹⁰³⁾

Among the main determinants of the societies' response to appeals for financial help from the unions were the status of societies, the degree of interchangeability of leadership and the occupational structure of the membership. All of the co-operative societies in the Lothians were a part of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society whereas the Radstock Co-operative and

101. Above, p.p.100-02.

102. On the role of the Co-ops see Stevens 'The Coal Mining Lockout of 1926' and A.Mason, The General Strike in the North East (1972), passim; M.Morris The General Strike (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1976), passim, and on the Poor Law Unions in the coalfields, p. 459

103. The Haddington Courier, October 6, 1922; 'A Brief History of Radstock Co-operative Society', photocopied extracts from the Society's journal (nos. 235-239), Fosseyway Printers, Waterloo Road, Radstock, n.d., c. 1984.

Industrial Society was (and still is) a completely independent organisation. In the Lothians Robert Burnside, president of MELMA, was a committee member of the Musselburgh and Fisherrow Society but he seems to have been the only prominent trade unionist in a position of influence. Interchangeability of leadership was of a higher order in Somerset, where at least one-third of the Radstock Co-Op committee in the early 1920s were SMA officials. Moreover, the committee chairman (the Revd. Ramsay) was a close personal friend of the SMA agent and, what is more, through his ILP and Labour party activities he had close associations with other union officials. The 9,950 members of the Radstock Co-op in 1926⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ were not predominantly miners and their families⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ but, nonetheless, many of them were. Indeed, when the Society later became embroiled in financial scandal there were accusations made that in 1921 and 1926 trade unionists as co-operators had voted money to themselves as miners.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

All the societies helped out by reducing prices on many staple foods during the disputes and some in the Lothians allowed their premises to be used as reception centres for food parcels but requests from MELMA for help with funds were turned down in April 1921, as all the local societies stated that their rules

104. The Chief Executive of the Radstock Society allowed access to the unsorted records and miscellaneous papers of the Co-op, from which the figures are taken.

105. The claim was made by one of the Co-operative Committee in 1931. Somerset Guardian, August 21, 1931.

106. Somerset Guardian, July 31, 1931,. Returns to the Registrar of Friendly Societies in 1929 revealed some inconsistencies, which led to an investigation by the Registrar and the CWS Audit Department. It emerged that the secretary had been falsifying accounts over many years, leading to a total shortfall exceeding £90,000 of which £13,000 was untraceable.

prohibited granting loans or extending credit.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ In 1926, presumably circumventing this rule, the Musselburgh and Fisherrow Society lent MELMA £1,500 following negotiations in which Robert Burnside played a major part.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In Somerset SMA funds were so depleted by the fifth week of the 1921 lockout that payments to members were suspended and officials were sent off to the Co-op to see if the society would extend credit to the union.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ A special meeting of co-operative members cheered the Revd. Ramsay to the echo when he announced that the committee proposed to advance £6,000 to the miners' union on the only security the SMA offered: 'their honour and goodwill as working men'.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ A further £3,000 was advanced without security but in June 1921 the SMA deposited its war bonds with the society, in return for £1,500 cash. The Co-operative committee was willing to lend more but, having already lent £4,500 above the amount its members had agreed to in May, decided that another meeting should be held. The SMA promptly applied for a further £1,500 but simultaneously appealed to miners who owned their own houses to hand their property deeds to the union to be used as security. This brought such a rapid and 'good' response that the Co-operative committee abandoned its plan to consult the members and gave another £1,500 in cash to the SMA.⁽¹¹¹⁾ In 1926, the Society gave substantial sums to the district relief fund and lent the SMA a total of £5,000.⁽¹¹²⁾

107. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), April 21, 1921.

108. Burnside was at this time president of both MELMA and the Musselburgh and Fisherrow Co-op.

109. The key figure here was Oliver Lewis, vice president of both the SMA and the Radstock Co-operative committee; see above, p, on other links between leadership in Somerset.

110. Somerset Guardian, May 20, 1921.

111. Minutes, SMA (BUL), July 9, August 6; September 1, 1921.

112. *ibid.*, June 1926, *passim*.

Levies were imposed to pay the 1921 debt (as well as to support the unemployed) until February 1922, when the amount owed had been reduced to £800.⁽¹¹³⁾ The final instalment was paid in September 1925, just seven months before the next confrontation in the coal industry began. In the first three weeks of May 1926 the SMA paid out over £4,288 in strike pay, reducing its credit balance to a little over £654.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ By the end of 1926 the Somerset union had £50 in its deposit account but owed the Co-op £5,000 and, in addition, had a £10,000 mortgage on its Radstock office.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Some months after the return to work the union appealed to former miners who had found work in other industries to either repay their 'share' of the co-op loan in a lump sum (assessed at £3.5/- per individual) or to continue to pay a full week's subscription (6d) to the SMA until the debt was cleared.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ At least some men did so, for there were complaints to the union from organisers in other industries that former miners would not join other unions because they were still paying into the SMA.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

An increasing amount of Fred Swift's time was taken up dealing with matters related to unemployment. The SMA's services to the unemployed included the loan of the union bicycle to those seeking work, when it was not required by the agent. It was, however, through Labour representation on local and county

113. *ibid.*, February 20, 1922; March 10, 1922.

114. *ibid.*, May 22, 1926.

115. Somerset Area (National Union of Mineworkers) Records, B/21, Financial Papers 1924-26, University College Library, Swansea, Wales.

116. Minutes, SMA (BUL), May 6, 1927.

117. The number of complaints and the number of miners are not specified but the minutes indicate that most complaints originated from organisers in the building industry.

councils, on the Clutton Board of Guardians (later the Frome Public Assistance Committee, after local government reform in 1929) and on Employment Committees and similar bodies that the union tried to defend and promote miners' interests. Both the SMA and MELMA were eager to see Labour candidates elected in the parliamentary constituencies of the coalfields. The topic is worthy of a thesis in itself but the intention here is to summarise the performance of Labour at general elections and then to focus on the relationship between the miners unions and the Labour party at local level.(118)

In the mining communities of both coalfields there was a strong labour presence between the wars, reflected in the numerous ILP and branch Labour parties, Women's Sections and Labour youth oraganations. Nonetheless, the local papers provide evidence of the existence of Conservative Unionist and Liberal Associations too and in the early years of the period Labour was building its strength in the constituencies. Electoral reform in 1918 had greatly enlarged the franchise while changes in the party's constitution made individual membership possible. Pre-1918 the mining vote in Somerset was split between Somerset North (which included Midsomer Norton, Paulton and Clutton) and Somerset, Frome. In both constituencies miners accounted for some 10 per cent of the electorate and were generally regarded as staunchly Liberal but rural conservatism was still widespread and Frome itself was close enough to the Longleat estate to be partly subject to the influence of the Marquis of Bath.(119) The average Conservative and Unionist vote over six elections from

118. For an account of the emergence of the Labour Party see P. Adelman, The Rise of the Labour Party (1972).

119. H. Pelling, The Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910 (1967), p.153.

1885 to December 1910 was 49.6 per cent of the total poll in Somerset North and 47 per cent in Frome.(120)

Constituency boundary changes in 1918 brought the whole mining district into the Frome constituency and local circumstances favoured Labour.(121) The MFGB candidate, Edward Gill, was a South Wales miner, a member of the ILP who had renounced his earlier pacifism and risen to the rank of Captain in the army, being twice decorated for gallantry. His death in 1923 marked an end of the miners' brief domination of the Frome Divisional Labour Party. The MFGB was willing to support a candidate in Somerset again but only one lodge committee (Bromley) nominated a candidate. Their choice was Oliver Lewis, so far to the left by local standards that he represented a one-man militant tendency. The SMA council, no doubt anticipating hostility to Lewis from Frome DLP, then asked the agent if he would allow his name to be put forward but Swift believed that 'it would tend to prejudice the electorate in the non-mining districts of the constituency and therefore he thought it inadvisable'.(122) Fear of the real

120. *ibid.*, Table 13, p. 149. For the Lothian constituencies in the same period see Pelling, *op. cit.*, p.p. 373-97.

121. J. Rutter, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in the Frome Parliamentary Constituency, 1895-1918, M.A. dissertation, Bristol Polytechnic (1985). The Liberals were in disarray in both constituencies, with the sitting members supporting Asquith in opposition to the majority opinion in the Liberal Associations. The Conservative candidate for Frome, Percy Hurd, had no previous connections with the area and was open to accusations of 'carpet bagging'. Moreover, the Frome DLP selected a candidate early on, broke the electoral truce and launched a vigorous campaign well before any of the other parties. For the growth of support for the ILP in the Somerset and Lothian coalfields see R. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914 (Oxford 1968), *passim*. On the Labour Party see I.G.C. Hutchison, A Political History of Scotland 1832 - 1924 (Edinburgh 1986), Chapter 9, 'The Arrival of Labour: 1914-24, p.p. 277-308; C. Chamberlain, 'The Growth of Support for the Labour Party in Britain', British Journal of Sociology, Vol.24 (1973), p.p. 474-87.

122. Minutes, SMA (BUL), October 26, 1923.

or perceived radicalism of the miners on the part of Frome DLP led to the 'banning' of Lewis and others (such as Wilf Young) from addressing meetings in Frome and many other parts of the district. Those with 'extreme socialist views' were confined to the coalfield.⁽¹²³⁾ The boot and shoe worker Fred Gould was subsequently selected and NUBSO⁽¹²⁴⁾ agreed to support him but, meanwhile, Frome DLP (perhaps as a small consolation to the SMA) had appointed Lewis as party agent. When NUBSO central office learned of this they announced that the union would not sponsor Gould unless Lewis was replaced. With some reluctance, the SMA eventually accepted this decision and Gould's son (Ron Gould, later president of the NUT) became agent.

The mining vote in the Lothians was also split, between the constituencies shown in Tables IV:V and that of Berkwickshire and Haddington. The Labour candidates in Midlothian and Peebleshire (Northern) from 1922 to 1935 (Andrew Clarke and John Lean) were both MELMA officials. Joseph Westwood, in the southern Midlothian constituency, was a Fife miner who was political organiser for the national union from 1918 to 1929.⁽¹²⁵⁾ He successfully fought the Stirling and Falkirk constituency in 1935, when David Pryde (president of MELMA from 1927 to 1932) was defeated by AHM Ramsay in South Midlothian. Pryde's defeat in 1931 in South Midlothian was a part of the general collapse of the Labour vote after the formation of the National Government but Ramsay (the Unionist candidate) was an extreme right winger with fascist

123. Letter from W. Young to Julian Rutter, June 21, 1983.

124. On Fred Gould's role in NUBSO and a history of that organisation see A. Fox, The History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (1958).

125. Bellamy and Saville (eds), Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. III (1974), p.p. 402-03.

sympathies who was detained in Brixton Prison from 1940 to 1944, under the Defence of the Realm Acts, and was immediately disowned by the Conservative party. (126)

TABLE IV : V
ELECTION RESULTS, NORTH MIDLOTHIAN, 1918-1935.

MIDLOTHIAN AND PEEBLESHIRE, NORTHERN						
Year	Electors	T'out	Candidate	Party	Votes	%
1919	25,291	49.4	Sir J A Hope, Bt. J B Cadzow	Co C	7,762	62.1
				Ind	<u>4,737</u>	<u>37.9</u>
					3,025	24.2
1922	24,939	72.7	G A C Hutchison A B Clarke E R McNab	C	7,416	40.9
				Lab	6,942	38.3
				L	<u>3,770</u>	<u>20.8</u>
					474	2.6
1923	25,278	74.7	A B Clarke G A C Hutchison C de B Murrey	Lab	8,570	45.3
				C	6,731	35.7
				L	<u>3,578</u>	<u>19.0</u>
					1,839	9.6
1924	25,889	79.2	G A C Hutchison A B Clarke	C	11,320	55.2
				Lab	<u>9,173</u>	<u>44.8</u>
					2,147	10.4
[Death]						
1929	28,586	66.0	A B Clarke D J Colville D E Keir J L T C Spence	Lab	7,917	42.0
				C	6,965	36.9
				L	3,130	16.6
				SNP	<u>842</u>	<u>4.5</u>
					952	5.1
1929	36,471	78.8	D J Colville A B Clarke D E Keir	C	11,219	39.1
				Lab	10,779	37.5
				L	<u>6,726</u>	<u>23.4</u>
					440	1.6
1931	39,296	78.2	D J Colville A B Clarke	C	22,211	72.3
				Lab	<u>8,501</u>	<u>27.7</u>
					13,710	44.6
1935	50,687	74.3	D J Colville L Lean	C	23,711	62.9
				Lab	<u>13,970</u>	<u>37.1</u>
					9,741	25.8

SOURCE: F.W.S. CRAIG, British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949 (Chichester, 1969-1983), No 605, p.638.

126. G. Anderson, Facists, Communists and the National Government. Civil Liberties in Great Britain 1931-37 (1983), p.186.

It seems that there was some support for Ramsay's right-wing views among the Lothian miners. The press reported 'a good attendance' at a meeting he addressed at Newtongrange in October 1931 and despite his strident attacks on the ILP, on the Labour party and socialism in general, no heckling or disturbances were reported.(127)

TABLE IV:VI

ELECTION RESULTS, SOUTH MIDLOTHIAN, 1918-1935

MIDLOTHIAN AND PEEBLES SHIRE, PEEBLES AND SOUTHERN						
Year	Electors	T'out	Candidate	Party	Votes	%
1918	23,310	52.6	Rt. Hon Sir D. MacLean J Gold	L	7,429	60.6
				Lab	<u>4,830</u>	<u>39.4</u>
					2,599	21.2
1922	23,453	75.7	J C Westwood A Crawford Rt. Hon Sir D. MacLean	Lab	6,394	36.0
				C	5,992	33.7
				L	<u>5,377</u>	<u>30.3</u>
					402	2.3
1923	23,831	76.9	J C Westwood A Crawford W Mitchell	Lab	7,882	43.0
				C	6,203	33.8
				L	<u>4,245</u>	<u>23.2</u>
					1,679	9.2
1924	24,210	78.8	J C Westwood Hon C W Baillie-Hamilton W Mitchell	Lab	7,797	40.8
				C	6,723	35.3
				L	<u>4,550</u>	<u>23.9</u>
					1,074	5.5
1929	32,420	75.7	J C Westwood H R Murray-Philipson J McGowan	Lab	11,161	45.5
				C	7,736	31.5
				L	<u>5,648</u>	<u>23.0</u>
					3,425	14.0
1931	33,394	79.7	A H M Ramsay J C Westwood	C	17,435	65.5
				Lab	<u>9,185</u>	<u>34.5</u>
					8,250	31.0
1935	34,536	74.9	A H M Ramsay D J Pryde	C(Ind)	13,671	52.8
				Lab	<u>12,209</u>	<u>47.2</u>
					1,462	5.6

SOURCE: F.W.S. CRAIG, British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949 (Chichester 1969-1983), No. 608, p.639.

127. Dalkieth Advertiser, October 1, 1931.

The East Lothian constituency of Berwickshire and Haddingtonshire was not contested by Labour candidates who were miners. Alex Murray (MELMA President in 1923) made a clear distinction between the two when he reported to the board in November 1923 that 'the union would contest North Midlothian [Andrew Clarke], South Midlothian would be defended by the present member [J. Westwood], also nominated by Scottish miners... while on the other hand Labour would be again contesting the East Lothian constituency'.⁽¹²⁸⁾ There is, indeed, some evidence to suggest that the Lothian leadership regarded the Labour party not merely as the political wing of the trade union movement but (within the coalfields) as the political party of the miners' union. In most Scottish mining constituencies the union dominated and controlled ILP and Labour party branches.⁽¹²⁹⁾ The South Midlothian and Peebles Labour Party was one example, founded at a meeting chaired by a miner and attended chiefly by miners. Not until three years after its formation were other unions in the constituency invited to affiliate and, when they did so, control of the executive remained firmly with the miners.⁽¹³⁰⁾ In 1932 all new members of MELMA were asked to sign the contracting-in form (agreeing to pay a political levy) 'so as to ensure that they become members of the Political side of our movement as well as the Industrial'.⁽¹³¹⁾

128. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), November 24, 1923.

129. Hutchinson, Political History of Scotland, p.298.

130. Minutes, South MidLothian and Peebles Labour Party, 1919-24, ACC 4312/23, NLS, Edinburgh.

131. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), November 30, 1932. In the spring of 1928 MELMA paid affiliation fees to local Labour parties based on 6,596 'political cards returned' by union members, *ibid.*, March 14, 1928.

The SMA also encouraged its members to pay political contributions⁽¹³²⁾ but, apart from the influence accruing from MFGB sponsorship of the constituency candidate between 1918 and 1923, it never dominated the Frome DLP. Miners as ILP members campaigned for the formation of a district Labour party but the local NUR and NUBSO favoured the idea earlier than the SMA.⁽¹³³⁾ Occupational structure determined that miners formed a majority of membership in many local branches of Frome DLP and at this level the SMA continued to nominate candidates for parish and district councils and (pre 1929) for the Board of Guardians. At the beginning of the period a divisional or branch parties' choice was often restricted to selecting one from several SMA nominees but as employment in mining declined circumstances changed and SMA nominations were by no means automatically selected. In March 1931 the SMA sent 'a letter of strong protest' to Midsomer Norton Labour Party when the agent reported that only one union nominee had been adopted as a candidate in the forthcoming UDC election.⁽¹³⁴⁾

The identification of activist-miners as 'extremists' almost certainly became an increasing handicap over the period. The militancy of the early years was likely to appeal to a politically unsophisticated, newly-enfranchised electorate but disappointment with Labour's performance in government and a

132. The SMA paid affiliation fees to Frome DLP at the end of 1929 based on a membership of 2,000. Swift estimated that eight out of ten union members paid political dues. Minutes, SMA (BUL), December 20, 1929.

133. Rutter, 'Rise of the Labour Party in Frome', passim. The MFGB was the last of the major unions to affiliate to the Labour party (in 1909) whereas both the NUR and NUBSO supported the Labour Representation Committee from an early stage.

134. Minutes, SMA (BUL), March 27, 1931.

growing awareness that the powers of Labour councils were strictly limited took much of the fire and enthusiasm out of politics.(135) In mining villages such as Camerton, Timsbury and Farmborough, radicalism persisted. It was from Labour branches in these places that calls came for communists to be admitted to the Labour Party or, later, for a Popular Front against fascism.(136) The 'red flaggers' - women prominent among them - were out in force during the 1931 election campaign in Farmborough, where 'the threat of mob rule' seemed a real danger on polling day.(137) This, however, was exceptional and by 1938 a Somerset Guardian reporter could comment on the Midsomer Norton district elections that 'politics seldom, if ever, enter into the business of the Council, although the Labour Party always puts forward candidates for each ward'.(138)

As SMA membership became increasingly irrelevant in the selection of Labour candidates, so the unions' policy of financing labour representation also changed. MELMA used its Labour Representation Fund throughout the period primarily for paying affiliation fees

135. This was not peculiar to the Somerset coalfield but a widespread phenomena. See C. Howard, 'Expectations born to death: local Labour party expansion in the 1920s' in Winter (ed) Working Class in Modern British History, p.p.65-81.

136. Julian Rutter made available copies of various source material used for his M.A. dissertation, including copies of the minutes of Frome DLP in the inter-war period. The local party's records were deposited with the National Museum of Labour History, London, c.1984. Letters to the Director in 1985-86 brought only obstructive or prevaricating replies until the museum's archives were removed to a warehouse in Manchester and stated to be unavailable.

137. Somerset Guardian, October 30, 1931.

138. Somerset Guardian, April 6, 1938. Labour gained one seat in this district council election, bringing its numbers to nine out of a total fourteen councillors.

to the national party and to district and local parties. The executive also made occasional grants from the Fund, as in May 1922 when the political organiser pointed out that the North Midlothian Divisional Labour Party was 'hardly in a position financially' to meet the expenses of a MELMA candidate elected to Edinburgh council.⁽¹³⁹⁾ Grants from £5 to some £150 were made at times of local and general elections to parties that specifically appealed for aid but a reference in the minutes of 1931 to 'various sums granted' being 'returned' from Labour parties suggests that these were loans rather than donations.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Moreover, the majority of appeals for finance were met with a recommendation to the Labour branch to apply to the Divisional Labour Party.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ In 1928 the executive recommended that part of the political fund should be set aside to 'assist Labour Representation on Public Bodies'⁽¹⁴²⁾ but the following year it was decided that applications for financial assistance would only be considered if they came from Divisional Labour Parties 'as these bodies were better able to consider all requests from local Labour parties'.⁽¹⁴³⁾ There is no evidence that MELMA directly supported members who were labour representatives, by paying their general expenses or an allowance for lost working time while performing public duties. This was standard practice^c in Somerset for much of the period. Other than paying affiliation fees to Frome DLP and extra grants for general election campaigns, this was the main purpose for which the political fund

139. Minutes, MELMA (NLS), May 24, 1922.

140. *ibid.*, February 3, 1931.

141. *ibid.*, October 28, 1921.

142. *ibid.*, February 25, 1928.

143. *ibid.*, December 31, 1929.

was used in Somerset although financial constraints and the declining role of the union seem to have eroded the practice by the late 1930s.

The chief significance of financial arrangements for labour representation and the relationship between the miners' unions and the Labour Party at local level is the change that was underway in Somerset. In the Lothians MELMA's dominance, financial and otherwise, of the divisional and branch parties made the details of finance largely irrelevant. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest any substantial shift from MELMA's perspective of the Labour Party within the coalfield as primarily the political wing of the union. In Somerset the changes marked a slow erosion of the tradition of independent representation of the miners by their union representatives, funded by the SMA. By the end of the period the force of changing circumstances had transformed the miner as sectionalist voter of the pre-1918 years into (among those who supported Labour) a secular voter, seeking to elect at local level working-class representatives who might be miners but were increasingly less likely to be so. This, however, is not to suggest that there was any substantial shift in political consciousness in Somerset. The available evidence suggests that "labourism", as defined by Saville,⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ was the dominant ideology in this coalfield as it was in many mining communities.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ More significantly, in

144. '..."A Fair Day's Wage for a Fair Day's Work". The pith of the labourist ideology is in this phrase. There was, on the one hand, a recognition that "fair" dealing was available and obtainable in bourgeois society; on the other, a stubborn insistence upon bargaining rights at the point of production'. J. Saville, 'The Ideology of Labourism' in R. Benewick, R. N. Berki and B. Parkeh, Knowledge and Belief in Politics (1973), p.p. 213-26, p. 216.

145. Saville, 'Ideology of Labourism', p.p. 217-19.

terms of the miners' relationship to the community, the diminishing role of the SMA in local politics was one factor that subtly eroded the distinctiveness of "the miners" and integrated them more fully with the wider working class in the coalfield.

The union and other working class organisations were generally more integrated in the Somerset coalfield than in the Lothians. The SMA had a visible presence at its Radstock headquarters whereas MELMA was removed from its membership by the decision to purchase a property in Edinburgh. The level of contact between the leadership and the members was greater in Somerset, facilitated by the small scale of the industry and the geographical size of the coalfield. The power and influence of the SMA agent was such that challenges to his authority were rare occurrences, while local circumstances mitigated against intra-union conflict of the bitterness and degree that developed in the Lothians. Leadership in local working-class organisations was virtually interchangeable in Somerset but less so in the Lothians.

The cohesiveness of the labour movement in the Somerset coal field probably owed more to cultural traditions and a "community spirit" than it did to either the occupational structure as it existed between the wars or to a distinct "craft consciousness" among the miners. The union, the co-op and some form of independent representation were all well-established features of the coalfield pre - 1914 and the values of collective self-help that they reflected and fostered persisted well into the later decades of the twentieth century. An inclusive attitude towards the unemployed on the part of the SMA provided a means of

maintaining its relevance and extending its role in the community, which to some extent offset its weakness in the workplace. Support from the membership for union policy, for levies to aid those out of work or on short-time, to pay off the debts accruing from the disputes of the 1920s - all these factors, in addition to the level of organisation and the SMA's relative success in retaining its members after 1926, indicate the existence of a work-based solidarity expressed as loyalty to the union. It was, however, also a reflection of the dominant values of the close-knit stable communities, where ties of kinship, of long standing friendship and the practices of 'neighbouring' encouraged miners and their wives to feel that those in work should 'help the others out a bit', as Fred Swift said.(146)

Somerset and Lothian miners probably shared many of the attitudes identified by Zweig during his investigation in the coalfields, which were published by the Left Book Club in 1948.(147) Zweig commented on the naive definitions of socialism he heard but noted the acute sense of justice felt by most miners: '"just and unjust", "fair and unfair" are the words most frequently used by the miner to describe his basic attitude towards things and men'. The great majority of miners, Zweig concluded, were 'not politically-minded but all of them have an enormous ... class consciousness'.(148) It could be argued that what Zweig identified was 'craft consciousness' but in the Somerset coalfield between the wars it was not entirely a case of "the miners for

146. Minutes, SMA (BUL), June 23, 1931.

147. F. Zweig, Men in the Pits (1948)

148. Zweig, op. cit., p.p.14-15.

the miners". Miners and the SMA came first perhaps but the social and political consciousness of the Somerset miners accomodated a "true" if local dimension of class consciousness and was not confined to solidarity within the occupational group.

Chapter Five.

The Mining Labour Force:

Influences on the Recruitment and Retention of Labour.

It is widely recognised that miners have particularly ambivalent attitudes to the way they earn their living. Over time, a marked antipathy to a physically arduous, dirty and dangerous job has generally co-existed with great pride in skills and 'pit-craft' and in the manly status of mining. Miners have often displayed quite obsessive attitudes to their work, so much so that there is some basis in fact for the cliché that more coal is won in the pubs and clubs on a Friday night than ever came out of the pits. Moreover, in addition to the many sources of potential job-satisfaction in the labour process itself,⁽¹⁾ miners frequently took pride also in their traditions of independence, trade-union solidarity and collective self help in their communities.

For many centuries the workforce was cyclically reproduced by the mining population, in which birth rate was persistently higher than the national average. A strong tradition of occupational inheritance⁽²⁾ characterised the industry and persisted well into the later twentieth century. This was of particular importance in mining because at most points in time only a small minority of the workforce were recruited as adults. However, occupational

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1. M. Benney, 'The legacy of Mining', in M. Bulmer (ed), Mining and Social Change, p.56.
 2. Which was reinforced by legal sanctions in the Scottish coalfields, where the colliers 'serfdom' persisted until the late eighteenth century. See Campbell, The Lanarkshire Miners, p.p. 9-23 and for further reading f.n. p. 24.

inheritance was increasingly eroded from the beginning of the twentieth century, to such an extent that a shortage of recruits and therefore of boy-labour was causing concern in many coalfields during the 1930s. Furthermore, a general shortage of labour was apparent in some coalfields by the end of the period and labour supply was a major problem for the industry during the second World War and its aftermath.

In this chapter influences on the recruitment of juveniles and on the retention of labour in the pits are considered primarily from a regional perspective. Changes in the wider society that made some impact on juvenile recruitment are identified as applicable to both Somerset and the Lothians. The growth of alternative employment is then discussed, with particular reference to occupational change in the Somerset coalfield in the late 1930s. Thereafter, the attitudes to pit work of Lothian miners, of their wives and their sons, are explored and compared with those of mining families in other Scottish coalfields. In conclusion, this topic is considered from a broader perspective, on the basis of a survey of the attitudes of mining and non-mining families, carried out in six British coalfields. The Social Surveys (the major source for the latter part of the chapter) were conducted in 1944 and 1946 but neither war-time changes in the industry or the imminent prospect of nationalisation were considered by the investigators to have made any significant impact on attitudes.

Somerset, as we have seen, was an area of family pits where even in the final years of the coalfield's life the bulk of the workforce was descended from a core of local mining families.⁽³⁾

3. Above, p.114.

As Sir Frank Beauchamp told the 1919 Sankey Commission, most Somerset miners were born in the coalfield: 'It is a sort of home of their own.'⁽⁴⁾ Asked by the MFGB secretary if it was not a fact that in the previous twenty to twenty five years boys growing up in the coalfield had migrated in large numbers to areas where wages were higher, Beauchamp acknowledged only that 'some of them have, the younger lads.'⁽⁵⁾ He admitted that the industry was losing some juvenile recruits to other trades but added 'I generally find that a mining family remains a mining family, to a very large extent.'⁽⁶⁾ Beauchamp went on to point out that wages had always been low in Somerset compared to many other coalfields but he suggested that this was compensated for by other factors:

They are much nicer districts to live in than some of the colliery districts I have seen elsewhere. The miners' villages in our part of the country are as pretty as agricultural districts, and you cannot say that for all the other coalfields in the country. Their house rents are low and the living, I think, is cheaper. We find that when some men go away and they hear of very high wages in South Wales, for instance, they go but it is only for a little time; they do not stop long.⁽⁷⁾

There is evidence to support Beauchamp's opinion that some of the migration from Somerset was only temporary. The overwhelming majority of miners and their wives living in Radstock in 1881 had been born within a ten mile radius of the town but some of their children were born in the coalfields of Staffordshire, Yorkshire and South Wales.⁽⁸⁾ Somerset was the birthplace of a high

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4. Report, R.C. on the Coal Industry (Sankey), Cmd 360 (1919), Vol. II, Report and Minutes of Evidence (second stage), p. 892 (21,998)
 5. *ibid.* p. 895 (21,433)
 6. *ibid.* p. 896 (21,438)
 7. *ibid.* (21,440)
 8. Census Returns, Radstock, 1881.

proportion of the population of the Rhondda in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁽⁹⁾ but by no means all of those who were attracted by good wages to a 'Somerset pit'⁽¹⁰⁾ in the valleys actually stayed in Wales. Stanley Chivers,⁽¹¹⁾ born in Midsomer Norton in 1901, is an example of the temporary migrant. He went to South Wales in 1918 but soon found that he was no better off. Lodgings and maintenance cost more than the sum he had 'tipped up' to his mother in Somerset. Moreover, he was expected to send money home to his family and was worried about managing his budget as his habits of thrift and temperance broke down in new surroundings: 'Mother did allus teach us to save a shillin' but there I did bide un av a drop to drink, gamblin' - all o' that.' Within a few months he was back at work in Norton Hill colliery. Nonetheless, at least some of the migration from the area was permanent.⁽¹²⁾ The loss of young, single men and of miners at the family-building stage of life was a contributory factor to both the fall-off in juvenile recruitment and the increasing age of the workforce. In 1918 over 500 boys aged fourteen to nineteen were employed in the Somerset coalfield. By 1944 the number in this age group was less than fifty.⁽¹³⁾

9. E.D. Lewis, The Rhondda Valleys (1959), p.p. 238-39.

10. Some pits were known as such, or as a 'Bristol' pit, where the workforce was dominated by migrant labour from one county or area.

11. Stanley Chivers, Midsomer Norton, June 1986.

12. In 1933, 638 unemployed men (chiefly miners) were 'placed' in other districts through the Employment Exchanges. A further 694 took jobs outside of Somerset in the first eleven months of 1934. Somerset Guardian, December 14 1934.

13. F.H.Kemp and D.C. Wilson 'Social Ecology of the Radstock Coalfield', The Lancet (February 1946), p.173.

Legislative change under the Coal Mines Act of 1911 regulated the employment of boys in the mines, prohibiting those under fourteen working underground at a time when the school leaving age was thirteen. In coalfields where boys customarily worked on the surface until their physical development reached a point at which they were transferred to heavier work at the face, the Act made little impact. However, in the south-western coalfields boys usually started underground on entry to the industry, as 'trappers' minding the doors, 'powder boys' for the shot-firers or as general assistants to deputies and horse-men. They were likely to be moved on to carting work within a few months because the primitive haulage system was heavily dependent on the agility as well as the muscle-power of adolescents. The consequences of the 1911 Act in these circumstances were commented on in 1915 by the Mines Inspector for the Midlands and Southern Division:

I have heard managers complain in certain districts, especially in the Forest of Dean and Somerset, that they cannot now get boys because the boys are free from school before they are of an age at which it would be permissible to employ them underground, and they drift off to other occupations. The parents cannot afford to keep them idle until they are 14 years of age and get them into the pit, so they put them to other work and having got that work the boys will not come back. They say they have more difficulty now in getting boys than they used to have when they could take boys fresh from school into the pit.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the industry as a whole, there was an increase in the average age level of the workforce between 1911 and 1931. The proportion of those in the under-sixteen age group, per 1000 employed, declined from sixty-six in 1911 to only thirty-six in 1931.

14. Reports, Departmental Committee on Conditions Prevailing in the Coal Mining Industry Due to the War, CD 8009 (1915), p.12.

Increased mechanisation of the haulage in many coalfields, such as the Lothians, meant that fewer boys were required in the pits but nonetheless the 1911 Act was one factor in the changing age structure of those employed in the industry. The question of the general shortage, surplus and redistribution of juvenile labour was the subject of an official enquiry in the late 1920s,⁽¹⁵⁾ which identified a war-time fall in birthrate as the cause of a drop in numbers of children in the fourteen to seventeen age group. Numbers leaving school were expected to reach a low point between 1931 and 1933, to be followed by an increase in 1934 (reflecting a post-war rise in birthrate) and by a gradual decline thereafter. In the coalfields of South Wales and Durham there was a surplus of juvenile labour⁽¹⁶⁾ but in districts where there was a shortage the Committee assumed that it would be offset in part by an increased use of labour-saving machinery.⁽¹⁷⁾ This happened to only a limited extent in Somerset. The proportion of output mechanically hauled from the face rose from 9 per cent in 1927 to 13 per cent by 1939⁽¹⁸⁾ but, as we have seen, managements' response was primarily that of redirecting labour by moving breakers on to carting work and by blocking the move of young workers from carting to face work.

Attempts to redirect labour at national level through migration were not successful. With depression in many staple industries

15. Cmd 3327, Memorandum on the Shortage, Surplus and Redistribution of Juvenile Labour during the years 1928-1933, Ministry of Labour (1934).

16. *ibid*; p. 7

17. *ibid*; p. 4

18. The Reid Report, Table I, p. II

but the expansion of new light industries (particularly in south east England) voluntary migration was sufficiently high to provoke an official inquiry into the distribution of the industrial population in the 1940s⁽¹⁹⁾ but between the wars no great enthusiasm was shown for the idea of enforced juvenile transfer from the depressed areas. Employment Committees were generally averse to recommending that young people (especially girls) should be 'introduced into entirely novel surroundings away from parental control and home influences.' As well as a widespread resistance⁽²⁰⁾ to transfer on the part of adolescents and their parents, antipathy to mining was a specific influence on attitudes in coalfields such as South Wales. Transfer to an occupation other than mining might have been acceptable but it was likely to be rejected if it entailed only geographical mobility, to work in another coalfield. Adult miners in Scotland shared this attitude. A survey conducted in the 1940s to assess the likelihood of voluntary migration from other mining districts to the expanding Fife coalfield revealed that miners were far more willing to consider moving if it would give them an opportunity to get out of mining into some other occupation.⁽²¹⁾

19. Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (The Barlow Report), Cmd 6153 (1940).

20. Memorandum, Juvenile Labour, p. 7

21. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities, (1944), passim.

The attractiveness of the industry was greatly diminished by its declining prosperity in the 1920s, which was reflected in mounting unemployment and short time working. Moreover, the direct impact on living standards of the major disputes in 1921 and 1926 influenced attitudes, as did the fall in wage rates that followed the employer's triumphs. Pre 1926 it was more or less taken for granted that every boy born in Newtongrange would grow up to work for the Lothian Coal Company but by the late 1920s some parents were eager to find alternative jobs for their children: 'fathers wouldn't let their sons go through what they'd gone through - poverty - stricken through the strike and not much better off when in work.' (21a)

The depressed condition of the industry affected recruitment at all levels, checking the flow of mining students to the universities as well as direct entry to the pits.⁽²²⁾ In general, recruitment of labour in the year 1924 came from within the coal industry. The percentage proportion of recruits to number employed at the end of that year was 10.9 per cent in Somerset and 30.4 per cent in the Lothians. Boys recruited straight from school represented just over a quarter (25.5 per cent) of the 418 new employees in Somerset collieries but school leavers were proportionally fewer in the Lothians, accounting for only 13.6 per cent of the total 1447 recruited.⁽²³⁾ By the 1940s, however, juvenile recruitment was worryingly low in Somerset. It was reported in the Colliery Guardian in 1928 that the supply of boys 'was more than adequate' for trade apprenticeships in mining

22. The Colliery Guardian, May 17 1929

23. Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1925) (Samuel), 1926 Cmd 2600 XIV; Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, Table 14, p. 213.

21a. (245)
Duncan Graham, Newtongrange.

and in Somerset it was virtually only in this sector (as electricians, carpenters and masons) that new young entrants were of any significance from the 1930s onward. (24)

Nonetheless, peer-group pressure, high wages in comparison to the main alternative (agriculture) and the manly status of mining still attracted some boys to the industry after working for a time in other occupations. One such late entrant was the brother of Ron Perret, who had worked at the Radstock Co-op for two years before throwing up his career behind the shop-counter to go into the pits:

Why he decided to enter the industry I do not know. All his friends were miners and I think he felt locked out from their fraternity... Mother pleaded with him to stay out of the pits but he was quite adamant. (25)

Yet it seems likely that Perret's bother and others like him were somewhat exceptional, for attitudes towards pit work were evidently changing. The mining community in Somerset was far from eager to get its men into the pits during the period. Rather, they were to some extent co-erced into the industry. (26) The growing reluctance of young men to follow their fathers underground, which Bill Williamson noted in the pit village of Throckley (on the Nortumberland - Durham border) in the 1930s, was also apparent in Somerset. (27) Some boys who worked on the

24. The Colliery Guardian, February 3, 1928; R.E. Goffee, 'Coalmining and Redundancy: the closure of the Somerset Coalfield', Report for the School of Management, University of Bath (1978), p. 7

25. R. Perret, Frome. Unpublished mss; family history.

26. Men were threatened with the sack if they refused to take their sons into the Somerset pits and widows' bag coal was withdrawn if they did not send their sons into the collieries. Young miners who gave notice were often told that their elderly fathers would be discharged, if the son left the pits.

27. B. Williamson, Class Culture and Community. A Biographical Study of Social Change in Mining (1982), p.p. 200-01

surface in Somerset in the 1920s were sacked for refusing to move to underground work⁽²⁸⁾ and they were not always supported by the SMA, which on occasions withheld victimisation pay from boys who broke with customary practise by declining an offer of underground work.⁽²⁹⁾

It is difficult to assess the impact of the campaign against the use of the guss and of the agent's reiterated pleas to parents to keep their sons out of the mines⁽³⁰⁾ but they seem likely to have influenced attitudes to some extent. Certainly, even before the campaign, notions of the dignity of labour and the indignity of pit work seem to underly the case of a nineteen-year old carter sacked from Norton Hill in 1920. Jack Matthews had worked at the colliery for six years and there had been no complaint against him until he was dismissed for allegedly sending too few tubs from his place. He was not regarded as a 'slacker' by his workmates and all five hundred of them walked out in protest when he was told to get his cards. This led to the case going to arbitration. In the course of the inquiry it emerged that Matthews had refused to use a guss and had also worked with his waistcoat on, in an attempt to keep dry in a particularly wet and difficult place. He would not take off his waistcoat when ordered to do so and it seems that his dismissal owed more to the manager's opinion that Matthews was 'undoubtedly insolent and impertinent' than it did to his low tonnage.⁽³¹⁾

28. Minutes, SMA (BUL), April 7, 1920

29. *ibid*; September 14, 1920

30. Above, p.p.218-19.

31. Somerset Guardian July 23, 1920

An official inquiry into juvenile recruitment, conducted in the 1940s, (32) attributed the fall-off in numbers partly to circumstances and events within the mining industry but also to wider social change. Unfavourable wages and conditions compared to other industries, a sharp decline in birth rate in the mining communities in 1927-28 (as a response to poverty) and a weakening of the tradition of occupational inheritance as the family-ties associated with hand-got methods were broken down by mechanisation were all indentified as causal factors. Increased public transport facilities and a growth of occupational choice were regarded as contributory but subsidiary factors.

Some of the effects of these broad social changes were summarised by a mining engineer writing in the Colliery Guardian in 1938. He suggested that the traditions and habits formed over long years of dependancy on the coal industry were breaking down, as the isolation of the mining communities was eroded:

Today, the miner is very much a part of the outside world. He is in touch with it through the agencies of the newspaper, the radio and the cinema. He looks around and picks and chooses from the many vacancies which are available in the surrounding industries. The young man thinks that, socially, an overall is a better garment than a pair of moleskins - so he makes up his mind that there is to be no black face for him and there is no one to replace him. The vastly improved transport facilities have made more easy this migration from the pits (33)

The author had earlier told a meeting of the Staffordshire and Warwickshire Institute of Mining Engineers that he had recently visited a colliery at Cannock Chase where he had asked how many

32. RG 23/85, Social Survey (PRO), Recruitment of Boys to the Mining Industry (1946).

33. The Colliery Guardian, July 29, 1938. Cf. D.Hay, 'Recruitment, Education and Progress in the mining industry', Transactions IME, XCIV (1937-38), p. 221

boys under sixteen were employed. He was shown a large box and told that in the past it had overflowed with the birth certificates of school-boy recruits. Now there were only three or four certificates in the box. The problem was so serious, he claimed, that collieries were 'absolutely crying out for young labour - they had their stallmen driving horses and minding doors, the problem must be tackled'.⁽³⁴⁾

In addition to improved transport and the growth of alternative opportunities, the effect of pit-closures almost certainly led to a change in attitudes towards the location of work in relation to home. It was many years before the Somerset villages of Dunkerton and Peasedown St. John recovered fully from the consequences of Dunkerton colliery closing down in 1927 but the local response was varied. Some miners and their families migrated to Kent, Yorkshire or parts of South Wales while large numbers went to the developing Dukeries district in Nottinghamshire.⁽³⁵⁾ Others, however, eventually found work at Norton Hill, Pensford or other collieries. It became increasingly less common for a man to work in his village pit, within walking distance from his home. Once a bicycle had been acquired and the adjustment made to a longer journey to work it is likely that men would have found it easier to think in terms of travelling some five to ten miles outside the coalfield rather than within it, to jobs in Bath, Frome or Keynsham. Moreover, unemployed miners who found temporary work of various kinds, or who went into other industries with every intention of returning to the pits at the earliest opportunity, may well have changed their attitudes to mining as their

34. The Colliery Guardian, August 19, 1938

35. Somerset Guardian, June 9, 1939

occupational experience was broadened. 'Odd jobs' in the coalfield took some miners off the unemployed register in the 1930s and many found work in the expanding Mendip stone quarries. In 1937 out-of-work miners were reported to account for a substantial proportion of the 150 men taken on to lay a gas main from Bath to Frome.⁽³⁶⁾ Men who had spent all their working lives in the pits but were forced by economic circumstances to move into other trades and industries were thus enabled to make comparisons between occupations. No doubt those who decided against mining discussed their reasons for doing so with friends and family.

Questions of wastage and recruitment attracted relatively little attention from Somerset coal owners and managers between the wars. This, as the assess^sors for the Regional Survey of 1944 commented,⁽³⁷⁾ was perhaps not surprising in the local circumstances. The shortage of boys was largely overcome (as in the Midlands) by the redirection of labour underground and the scale of contraction in the industry in Somerset between 1920 and 1938 had displaced roughly 6,400 wage-earners, creating a pool of experienced surplus labour in the mining communities. The size of the surplus, however, was nowhere near as great as the decline in employment might suggest. Moreover, numbers of both unemployed and working miners showed a preference for non-mining work once opportunities to leave the pits presented themselves.

36. Somerset Guardian, January 29, 1937

37. Regional Survey (Bristol and Somerset), p. 25

With the commencement of rearmament in 1938 and the imminence of war, the industry steadily lost manpower to the munitions factories and the armed forces and it was unable to recruit workers on the scale necessary to make good the loss and maintain output.⁽³⁸⁾ In the spring of 1939 the Somerset pits were all working 'at top pressure' but some of the collieries were two to three weeks behind with their orders and unable to produce enough coal to meet the demand.⁽³⁹⁾ Later during the war years four aircraft or arms factories were established in the coalfield, located in the district specifically to draw on the labour-reserve of married women in the mining communities.⁽⁴⁰⁾ However, the first factory to attract labour from the mining industry was not only outside the coalfield but actually outside the county - at Corsham, just over the Wiltshire border.

Colliery owners were soon so perturbed by the drift of labour from the mines that vigorous attempts were made to get the long-term unemployed back into the pits and one company even sent officials to South Wales, to try to recruit men from that coalfield. Managers made personal appeals to some elderly men who had not worked for years but, in general, they found them 'not anxious to resume work underground.'⁽⁴¹⁾ The SMA agent claimed that this group included men of sixty-five or more, many of them 'good workmen' who were not put on after the 1926 stoppage. If they would not now return to the pits 'I don't blame them' said Swift, 'I would not - after being out so many years'.

38. *ibid*

39. *Somerset Guardian*, March 31, 1939

40. HGL 71/1009 (PRO), *The Somerset Coalfield Area (Town and Country Planning)* (1944) p.p. 2-3

41. *Somerset Guardian*, March 10, 1939

The agent pointed out that the owners' policy of insisting on medical examinations for signs of silicosis had led to the dismissal of numbers of men and of others being turned away from the collieries when they had applied for work. Yet men in this 'unfit' category who later found work at the Corsham Arms factory were 'looking well on it.'

The secretary of the Bath and District Local Employment Committee assured coal owners that no man under contract of service in the mines would be taken on at the arms factory but he added that an unemployed miner had 'a perfect right to put his labour where he likes.' This assurance outraged Fred Swift, who suspected the coal owners of lobbying for support in appropriate quarters:

It is highly improper to approach a Government Department with a view to encouraging it to prevent men getting work they have a right to get. Obviously, representations have been made in certain directions... I say it is wrong that anyone should interfere with the miner to exercise his right as a British citizen to sell his labour to the best advantage. They go to Corsham [munitions factory], which is a more congenial occupation. They get better pay, they have holidays with pay and they get statutory holidays - none of which applies in the mines....I resent very much anyone endeavouring to restrict the rights of the workman.⁽⁴²⁾

As Swift commented, if the owners wanted to recruit and retain labour they would have to make pit work more attractive: 'boys are not going into the mines... men are getting out of them as quick as they can because of the conditions.' This was also the case in the Lothians, a coalfield that did well in relative terms between the wars and in which it might have been expected that attitudes to mining as an occupation would have been somewhat more favourable than they were in Somerset. Yet the social

42. *ibid.* The information and quotations are taken from a lengthy report of a meeting of the Bath and District Local Employment Committee, of which the SMA agent was a member.

survey of the Scottish mining communities in the mid 1940s found that the general reluctance to move to Fife was closely bound up with a widespread dislike of mining. Moreover 'at times this dislike appeared no longer to be based upon specific grievances but to have developed into a commonly held belief needing no further justification.' (43)

Nonetheless, most Scottish miners - when they were asked - mentioned specific aspects of the industry that they disliked. It was, however, a major part of the purpose of the survey to discover to what degree the acceptance of mining as an occupation might be increased by improved housing, social facilities and general town planning and the questions asked also covered these topics. The sampling unit was the miners' household, the bulk of miners interviewed (76 per cent) being underground face workers. Out of a total of 1,713 households, 310 (18 per cent) were located in Mid and East Lothian while 19 per cent of the 1,451 housewives interviewed were also living in the Lothian coalfield. (44)

The strength of the hereditary tradition in mining was highlighted by the information on family background, which showed that the fathers of the overwhelming majority of both miners and their wives had at some time been miners. The proportion of the total sample whose fathers had been miners was, however, lower in the Lothian region than elsewhere. In all the coalfields fewer housewives than miners came from mining families and the Lothians' sample recorded the smallest proportion of housewives whose fathers had been miners. It can therefore be inferred from

43. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities, p.v (2).

44. *ibid*, p. 5

the data that the mining tradition was less-firmly established in the Lothians, where the industry had expanded at a relatively late stage and drawn fairly recently on labour from other sectors.

As a first step towards understanding miners' attitudes to their occupation, they were asked to give their reasons for entering the industry. The influence of family tradition was mentioned by 14 per cent of respondents while a large proportion gave high wages as the primary attraction of mining. However, the chief reason given (by 44 per cent of miners) was in the 'no alternative' category. Regional analysis reflected the dominance of mining in the older coalfields and indicated that lack of other opportunities was least significant in Fife and Clackmannan and in the Lothians. The attraction of high wages was cited more often by Lothian miners than by men from other coalfields but there was little regional variation in the proportions who followed their fathers into the pits. It was suggested that this indicated that there was a more or less stable proportion of the mining population that was strongly influenced by family tradition and loyalty, as would seem also to be the case in the Somerset coalfield.

It was acknowledged in the report on the findings of the survey that dissatisfaction, in varying degrees of intensity, was probably widespread in many occupations and, furthermore, that the 'choice' which an individual might exercise in selecting his job was 'no doubt largely illusory'.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Nonetheless, the

45. *ibid*, p.p. 21-4

46. *ibid*, p. 26. On occupational choice for school-leavers in post-second World War Britain, see M. Carter, Into work, Pelican paperback (1966; 1971)

majority of Scottish miners expressed extremely negative attitudes to their work. Miners were asked what they thought of mining as a career for themselves; housewives were asked what they thought of it as a job for the chief wage-earner in the household - whether husband, son or father. Only 17 per cent of the total sample were satisfied with mining. Almost one third stated a preference for other employment, while 20 per cent of miners and 25 per cent of housewives thought they (or their chief wage-earner) would stay in the industry only because there were no prospects of getting other work. Housewives were far more opposed to mining as a career for sons than for husbands, which was interpreted as in part a reflection of the common hope of parents - especially of mothers - that their children would do better in life in socio-economic terms than they themselves had done. The data revealed a distinct tendency in the total sample to 'increasing acceptance of mining with age'.⁽⁴⁷⁾ This finding has some relevance for Somerset, where by the 1940s the average age of the mining workforce was considerably above that for the industry as a whole. Comments on the insecurity of pit work, the danger and the bad conditions of employment were commonplace and many miners (especially in the younger age groups) considered it likely that they would leave the industry if the chance to do so arose.

The desire to move to another job was most common in the Lothians and in the Ayrshire coalfield. Those who thought mining had 'no prospects' and was an insecure occupation were also more frequently found in these areas, as were those who mentioned bad working conditions. It seems likely that in the Lothians these

47. *ibid.* p. 29

attitudes were partly a consequence of the relative weakness of a mining tradition, for Lothian men said less frequently than others that they were 'resigned to mining' and fewer of them were prepared to stay in the industry because of lack of local alternatives.(48)

Out of the total number of 1713 miners, 87 per cent thought there was something wrong with the industry. Over half the sample complained of generally bad working conditions and nearly 40 per cent criticised wage levels. 'Bad management' came third in the hierarchy of grievances. Except in the oldest age group (where they were less common) there was a fairly stable proportion of around 4 per cent who declared that 'everything' was wrong with mining. For all regions the main criticisms were the same but the Lothian coalfield had the highest proportion who mentioned the need for nationalisation, the insecurity of the job and bad management. It was suggested in the report that this response related to conditions in the Lothian mines, rather than being related to the occupational structure of the region.(49)

It was considered possible that the unpopularity of mining owed something to the attitudes of the general public to the industry or, more particularly, to how the miners and their wives believed themselves to be regarded by the non-mining sector of society. In response to a question about whether or not the general public knew enough about miners and mining, the almost

48. *ibid.* pp 30-32

49. Demands for nationalisation were higher in areas where miners were more concentrated in the occupational structure than they were in the Lothians, where hostility to bad management seemed the main reason for the strength of opinion in favour of nationalisation.

unanimous answer was 'No.'⁽⁵⁰⁾ No regional differences were apparent in this response. Further questioning of those who felt that too little was generally known about the industry and its workforce revealed a substantial proportion 'who said that they felt themselves considered socially inferior because they were miners.' Three times as many housewives as miners commented on this, a difference ascribed to the fact that wives mixed more freely than miners with people unconnected with the industry and would therefore be more exposed to any social snobbery that existed. Another pertinent fact revealed by the survey was that although 'bad housing' was a major cause of discontent for miners and especially for their wives, very few of the total sample wanted the poor conditions prevailing in the mining communities to be publicised. It was apparently feared that revelations of the squalor of the coalfields would lower the social prestige of miners still further.⁽⁵¹⁾ This response adds weight to the argument above⁽⁵²⁾ that the focus of government and public concern on the mining communities between the wars had a detrimental effect on attitudes to mining as an occupation. The coalfields became virtually synonymous with 'derelict regions' or 'depressed areas', the communities were increasingly seen as living laboratories in which social investigators and others could explore the links between poverty, social deprivation and ill-health. Miners and their families, with their traditions of independence and self-help, became the objects of charity, pitied or patronised at best but just as likely to be derided or despised.

50. *ibid*; p.38. 91 per cent of miners and 79 per cent of housewives answered 'no'.

51. *ibid*. p.39. See also Zweig, Men in the Pits, p.p.141-45.

52. Above, p.p.175-76.

Data on the occupations of miners' sons, analysed by age, showed that over the whole sample 45 per cent of miners' sons were working in the industry. If, however, sons in the forces who had been in the mines before call-up were taken into account this proportion would have been 54 per cent. These sons were in the older age groups and therefore the proportions in these categories were, in reality, larger than the apparently roughly equal proportions shown in Table V : I

TABLE V : I

OCCUPATIONS OF SCOTTISH MINERS' SONS, ANALYSED BY AGE.

OCCUPATION	AGE GROUPS, BY PERCENTAGE		
	14-19	20-24	25 & OVER
TOTAL NUMBERS	264	309	421
MINING	43%	44%	45%
FORCES/NAAFI	9	37	33
OTHER/UNEMPLOYED	9	5	5
ENGINEERING	5	4	3
TRANSPORT	2	3	5
OFFICE WORK	2	-	1
FARM WORK	7	1	1
FACTORY	4	2	3
BUILDING	6	2	1
DISTRIBUTIVE	10	1	1
UNOCCUPIED	2	1	1
NO ANSWER	2	-	1

SOURCE: Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities, RG 23/72 (PRO) P. 43.

This indicates that miners' sons in the age group fourteen to nineteen were entering mining less frequently than boys from mining families had done earlier in the period.

Parents, teachers and juvenile Employment Boards were all to some slight extent influences on occupational choice but statements from fathers indicated that the majority of both sons and daughters of miners were left to decide for themselves what type of jobs they wanted. Boys who went into mining chose this for

themselves slightly less frequently than those going into other occupations and in these cases it was usually the father who made the decision. Asked what occupation they would prefer for their sons still at school, only 3 per cent of miners wanted them to go into mining. Over half the fathers (55 per cent) said they would prefer 'anything but mining' for their sons. It was considered that this response was not influenced by any concern to see children go into work for which they seemed particularly suited by temperament or abilities but by a strong dislike of mining as such.

Some 900 children who were expected to leave school in the near future took part in the survey, by completing a schedule under supervision. A list of seven occupations (engineering, transport, building, farm work, factory work, office work and mining) were compared one to the others and the children asked to choose between them. All six of the proposed alternatives were preferred to mining, with transport and engineering proving the most popular choices and office work the least so.

In summarising the data on attitudes to mining, it was concluded that although juvenile recruitment had fallen during the inter war period, mining nonetheless remained a largely hereditary occupation. Although the majority of miners were strongly antagonistic to the idea of their sons following them into the pits, more than half of their sons had in fact done so. Moreover, almost all of the relatively few children who showed a preference for mining over other suggested alternatives had their father or a brother, or both, already in the pit. Yet only a small minority of miners' sons who had entered the industry were there because

of any positive liking for the work. Parental influence, family tradition and the absence of local alternatives were the main factors inducing boys to take up pit work. (53)

These findings raised questions about future recruitment. A campaign aimed specifically at the mining communities seemed most likely to succeed in attracting young entrants to the industry but it also seemed likely that the occupation would gain more social prestige if its hereditary nature was ended. It was suggested that if labour moved as freely in and out of mining as in other occupations this would help to break down the widespread ignorance about the job and might help to raise the prestige of the miner amongst the general workforce. With such strong evidence of unqualified dislike of mining, no longer based on specific grievances, it was recognised that improvements in conditions and wages might not be sufficient to rehabilitate the status of the industry. What was needed simultaneously, it was proposed, was an attempt 'to obtain a general acceptance by both miners and non-miners of the national importance and honourable nature of mining as an occupation'. (54)

The findings of the survey of the Scottish coalfields were largely confirmed by a further inquiry, carried out for the Ministry of Fuel and Power in 1946. This was specifically concerned with the recruitment of boys to the industry and its purpose was to identify the attitudes towards mining as an occupation of parents and boys living in the coalfields. (55)

53. Social Survey, Scottish Mining Communities p.p. 20-37.

54. *ibid.*, p. 51

55. Social Survey, Recruitment of Boys.

The number of entrants to mining had been comparatively high during the early part of 1946 but this was attributable to abnormal post-war circumstances and it was recognised that the basic problem of too few juvenile recruits was likely to persist. Moreover, the school-leaving age was about to be raised to fifteen and it was feared that this would not only reduce numbers of school-leavers in the immediate future but might also mean greater competition for their labour when they did leave school.(56)

Mining and non-mining families took part in the survey, which was conducted between August and October 1946 in the six coalfields of Fife, Durham, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire and South Wales. A total of 2,593 parents of boys aged thirteen to eighteen were interviewed. A third (33 per cent) of boys from mining families were employed in coal mining and 7 per cent of those from non-mining families. Excluding mining, the main kinds of work done were labouring of various kinds, apprenticeships, semi-skilled jobs, errand boys, paper boys and shop assistants and (to a lesser extent) factory machinists and clerks.(57) Few parents had made any plans for their sons' careers while they were still at school but the one in four who had done so mainly wanted skilled work. Trades such as carpenter, electrician and mechanic were considered to offer good prospects and wages as well as job security. It was found that miners' sons were less likely to be apprentices than others were and more likely to become labourers, errand boys or shop assistants. These latter jobs were ranked in

56. *ibid*; p.p.1-2

57, *ibid*, p.4; 69 per cent of the families interviewed were mining families, p. 73.

undesirability with mining. Therefore, even the modest ambition of seeing a boy 'get a trade' was not often realised by those mining families who had aspirations for their sons.

Some 6 per cent of schoolboys whose fathers were miners wanted to work in the pits. The fact that 33 per cent of miners' sons in employment were actually in the industry was ascribed largely to a lack of other opportunities and interpreted as meaning that a considerable proportion of boys had entered mining unwillingly. As in the Scottish survey, mining fathers were more favourably inclined to mining for their sons than their wives were and boys from mining families were more likely to show a preference for the job than those from non-mining families. Most parents and boys who had given any thought to mining as an occupation had rejected it. The proportion who decided in favour of it was very small: one in five of mining parents, one in ten of non-mining parents and one in twenty of boys.⁽⁵⁸⁾

In answer to questions about the worst aspects of mining, miners generally regarded face work as the most disagreeable job in the pits. Moreover, their response suggests that notions of hand-got methods being psychologically satisfying should be treated with caution. Mechanisation was identified by one mining engineer in 1938 as a major cause of recruiting difficulties. Machinery at the face, he argued, was dusty, noisy and 'tyrannical'. Not only was mechanised mining more 'exacting' but a good worker had the same amount of coal to get off as an indifferent one and would get the same pay. There was 'no sense of individual responsibility, no pride in the work', he claimed, whereas when

58. *ibid*, p 7

a man's reputation and wages depended on his skill in working his place he was likely to have 'that contentment of mind that would lead to a father wanting his son to become as good a man as himself and to follow in his footsteps.'⁽⁵⁹⁾ Mining fathers, however, said most frequently that hewing by hand was the most unpleasant work of all underground. Yet miners also said, almost as frequently, that boring, ripping and cutting by machine were the worst jobs.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The answers were not correlated to the specific work done by these miners but given the deep dissatisfaction with mining in general it seems likely that hand-hewers intensely disliked hand-hewing and that machine miners felt the same about their tasks. The overwhelming majority of respondents found something disagreeable to say about mining but 55 per cent of mining fathers identified some good points about the industry and most of those interviewed - particularly mining fathers - were optimistic that improvements would be made and would help to attract recruits. Judged by the frequency with which it was mentioned, the most important improvement suggested by parents was more mechanisation. This may seem at odds with the complaints about mechanised mining above but the general attitude to mechanisation was assessed on the basis of answers from all categories in the sample, not only mining fathers. Nonetheless, a clear majority of all parents and three-quarters of the boys thought mechanisation would make mining a better job.⁽⁶¹⁾ It was

59. The Colliery Guardian, July 29, 1938.

60. Social Survey, Recruitment of Boys, p. 14

61. *ibid*, p. 17. Only 1 per cent of the sample thought that mechanisation would make mining 'worse', by possibly increasing accident rates and unemployment in the industry.

thought that it would make the work easier, improve output and underground conditions and make the work both safer and more interesting. The report on the survey concluded that mechanisation could be of considerable importance in attracting recruits and, furthermore, that it might assist in the recognition of mining as a skilled job.

Job-status and the social status of mining were key factors in the recruitment problem but, nonetheless, the results of the survey were not entirely discouraging. They showed that some parents and boys at least thought about mining as a career before rejecting the possibility. Moreover, although only a minority of parents had consistently positive attitudes to mining, of those who were firmly opposed to it at the outset 12 per cent were prepared to say that they were neutral towards it as an occupation by the end of the interviews. The same process was observed among the boys interviewed, though to a lesser extent and degree. It therefore seemed that more mechanisation, future improvements in conditions and well-publicised recruiting campaigns which emphasised the skilled status, national importance and secure nature of pit work might bring a good response from potential entrants and their parents.

Where there was cause for apprehension on the basis of the survey data was in the intensity of hostile feelings towards mining, displayed in the body of the report. Mining was widely recognised as not only of national importance but as the most important industry of all.⁽⁶²⁾ Moreover, in terms of material incentives,

62. *ibid*, p. 19

wages, welfare arrangements and hours of work mining was by 1946 considered to be 'better' than most other occupations.⁽⁶³⁾ Nine out of ten mining fathers - whether for or against pit work for their sons - acknowledged that there had been significant improvements in all aspects of mining in the preceeding twenty years.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Yet only one mining family in five with children aged thirteen to eighteen had a son or sons in the pits and one in three of parents in those families were against their sons being in mining.

Factors in favour of mining were outweighed by what were described as the 'emotional disadvantages' of pit work - the unhealthy and dangerous nature of the job, its physical arduousness, poor prospects and memories of inter-war unemployment and short-time working. Moreover, it was noted that for some time miners and their families had felt generally that they were regarded as socially inferior by people not engaged in mining and it was recognised that this too was an influence on attitudes to mining as an occupation. Indeed, its importance was clearly revealed in the opinions expressed about the disincentives to recruitment. As well as conditions in the pits, social standing, housing and amenities, compensation payments and the chances of alternative employment for disabled miners were discussed. The only one of these additional factors to be mentioned spontaneously as 'against' coal mining was social status.⁽⁶⁵⁾

63. ibid, p. 2

64. ibid, p.14

65. ibid, p.10

A part of the survey was therefore directed to assessing the perception of miners' and their wives of their status, compared to that of 'other skilled workers' and, in addition, to what extent non-mining families considered miners to be their social inferiors. A number of parents and boys commented that the social standing of the miner had improved in the recent past. Fairly substantial proportions in each category gave no answer or were not willing to offer a judgement on the issue. Excluding these 'don't knows'

TABLE V :II

OPINIONS IN SCOTTISH MINING COMMUNITIES (1944)
ON THE SOCIAL STANDING OF THE COAL MINER
COMPARED WITH ALL OTHER SKILLED WORKERS.

	Non mining parents, Male and Female		mining parents, Male Female			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
HIGHER	52	9	57	9	90	6
SAME	240	42	216	36	443	31
LOWER	205	36	251	42	591	41
DON'T KNOW	66	12	71	12	293	21
NO ANSWER	3	1	7	1	8	1

SOURCE: Social Survey, Recruitment of Boys, RG 23/85 (PRO), P.32 (22).

and others (whose opinion cannot be guessed at) a computation of the figures in Table V:II clearly reveals that miners and their wives were likely to perceive their social status as more inferior than it actually was, if judged by the response of non-mining parents.

While more than 60 per cent (62.4 per cent) of men and women outside mining believed the social standing of the coal miner to be equal if not greater than that of all other skilled workers, over half the miners wives (52.5 per cent) and almost half the miners (47.9 per cent) believed the status of miners to be seen as lower.⁽⁶⁶⁾ There was a close connection between these attitudes and general approval or disapproval of mining as an occupation. Among parents and boys, those who were not in favour of mining were very frequently those who considered miners to be regarded as socially inferior.⁽⁶⁷⁾ On these grounds, therefore, mining was likely to be even more unpopular among the mining population - because of this perception of its low status - than it was among the general public.

Certainly, prejudice against the mining population did exist, even if it was less pervasive than miners and their wives believed it to be. Miners who were content with their personal circumstances may well have resented their public image as the epitome of the downtrodden, socially-deprived proletarian. One such was Andrew Duncan, who went voluntarily into the pits when many miners were hoping to leave them. He had done a sort of apprenticeship to a master-butcher in Edinburgh, where he lived with his wife who had a miner brother working for the Lothian Coal Company. The Duncan's looked enviously at the 'little palace' in Newtongrange on visits to the family, for rents in the

66. *ibid*, p.32.

67. *ibid*, p.9

city were much higher and standards of accommodation not too good at the lower end of the housing market. They wanted to start a family but felt it would be wrong to bring bairns into a one-room existence in a tenement yet, without the wage of a working wife, a bigger and better flat would be even further beyond their means. Work in the pits was the answer to the problem. Andrew Duncan's brother-in-law 'spoke' for him at Lady Victoria Colliery and in 1929 he started working as a surface labourer. He soon progressed to better paid underground work and before long went on to the coal face. His attitude to work was instrumental. There were, as he said, good and bad aspects to every job but it was not the type of work or the wage in itself that mattered, they were just the means to an end. Andrew Duncan was proud of his well-maintained company house, the social amenities and respectable tone of Newtongrange. He took a great pleasure in having a garden, got on well with his workmates and neighbours, thought the wages were not too bad. Not surprisingly, therefore, he resented what he believed was the public perception of a 'miner' as a poor wretch who had been drawing the dole for years, living with his impoverished family in an overcrowded and insanitary hovel. (68)

Miners in general usually display a greater degree of emotional attachment to their occupation than the Lothian miner above.

68. Andrew Duncan, Newtongrange. Went into the pits in 1935.
Interviewed July 1986.

Their attitudes, however, are almost invariably a complex and ambivalent mixture of responses that not infrequently appear to be totally contradictory. Research in Somerset for an earlier dissertation on the coalfield⁽⁶⁹⁾ revealed a strong pride in the mining tradition and it was evident that some men felt personally diminished when they had to leave the pits to work in service industries, or alongside women in factories. Yet such men and others, who spent forty years or more in the mines with no regrets, frequently spoke of themselves as 'thankful', 'grateful' or 'damned glad' that pit-work for them was a thing of the past.

Pit closures in Scotland sometimes provoked less ambivalent responses. The closure of Prestonlinks colliery at Prestonpans in March 1964 brought to an end seven centuries of coal mining in East Lothian. A local newspaper reporter writing about the last production shift worked at Prestonlinks, noted that

It was an event of great significance but no tears were shed. Remarkably, to those with no connection with the mines, there was no show of sentiment, no long last looks at the 100 year old workings. The 185 men who worked the last shift were not sad: some were worried, some were angry and some were even glad.⁽⁷⁰⁾

The worry and the anger were chiefly related to fears of unemployment. Elderly men took early retirement and some others opted for voluntary redundancy but underground workers who wanted to stay in the industry were almost all transferred to Monktonhall pit, in Midlothian. Twenty six surface men, however, were not offered alternative jobs in the industry. One of them,

69. See f.n.1, p.vii.

70. Haddington Courier, March 6 1964

Francis Wynne from Tranent, announced himself 'disgusted with it all.' After six years on the surface and more than twenty years service in the industry the prospect facing him was, he said, 'about £2 a week redundancy pay for twenty six weeks and then the dole.' Pit-deputy Jock Close from Cockenzie was one of four sons of a miner, two of whom were 'sent to work at the 'Links because "there was no other work and we needed the money."' He spoke bitterly of his forty-seven years in the mine and told the press 'I would like to cut the ropes of all the pits in Scotland because mining is a dirty, filthy job.' He went on to say that in his opinion other miners would be sorry to lose their local jobs but not about the pit closing, since 'They are only here for the money.' (71)

Antagonism and hostile attitudes to mining evidently persisted into the post-nationalisation era, despite the substantial improvements in wages, hours, conditions and labour relations that followed from vesting day in January 1947. (72) The dirt, dust and danger of mining were inherent features of the industry and comparatively little could be done to modify them but, over time, relatively high wages had to some extent compensated for the disadvantages of mining. Once a mining population was established around a colliery the availability of local employment and the lack of alternatives encouraged the early formation of a tradition of occupational inheritance but falling birth rate and changes in the regulations governing underground work for boys were affecting juvenile recruitment in the first decades of the twentieth century. Between the wars, the

71. *ibid.*

72. Below, p.274.

spread of public transport and increased occupational choice caused a further fall-off in numbers of school-leavers entering the industry, while also making it possible for some dissatisfied miners to get out of the pits. The depressed state of the industry increased its unattractiveness. Lower wages and longer hours after the defeats of the 1920s were obvious sources of discontent but so too was the growing lack of job security. Unemployment and short-time were commonplace but, furthermore, a miner could no longer assume that when 'knocked up' he would be found light work on the surface. It was more likely that at the first sign of industrial disease or physical decline, he would be sacked.

Mechanisation changed the social relations of production and although on the whole miners were not unfavourable to it, it is possible that it influenced attitudes in a subtle way, at a subconscious level. Whereas a father had often taken his own son into the pits and there socialised him into work and taught him the skills of the job, this personal element and familial pattern was broken down as new methods were introduced. Moreover, managements' response to the shortage of juvenile labour in Somerset, Staffordshire and elsewhere was an effective attack on the status of the face workers. Experienced coal breakers were increasingly likely to find themselves forced down the hierarchy onto lower wages as carters, trappers or horse-drivers.

The impact of poverty on the mining communities and the glare of publicity given to them in relation to the major social problems of the inter-war years are discussed more fully in the following chapter but these factors were associated with the perception by

mining families of their social status as being widely considered inferior to that of most skilled workers. The breakdown of the social and psychological isolation of mining communities was arguably less - advanced by the end of the 1930s than has sometimes been suggested⁽⁷³⁾ but the process of change between the wars was, nonetheless, significant. A greater knowledge of other ways of life, of different kinds of work, a growing awareness of possibilities beyond the pit and the pit village all encouraged parents to raise their aspirations for their children. What is more, to some extent it changed the collective reference point of miners and more especially of their wives. Comparisons were less likely to be made to past conditions in the community, or between coalfields in different regions but more likely to be drawn with average standards prevailing in the wider society.

Occupational inheritance persisted despite its marked decline. The evidence indicates, however, that this did not reflect positive attitudes towards mining on the part of the majority of miners' sons who went into the industry. A core of mining families did retain a strong attachment to the occupation and it is highly likely that in Somerset this core group was proportionally greater than in the Lothians because the mining tradition was more firmly established in the settled, stable communities of the Somerset coalfield. The inter-war years witnessed a massive decline of employment in mining, in the order of 50 per cent. Methods were primitive and working conditions particularly unpleasant, while wages were among the lowest in the industry. Yet Somerset remained an area of 'family pits' until its eventual closure in the early 1970s. Lothian miners were -----
73. Below, p.p.296-98.

geographically and occupationally more mobile than those in other Scottish coalfields. They were less resigned to mining, more likely to leave the pits for other work at the first opportunity. Wage levels were their chief concern and they were highly critical of conditions in the pits and of management in general. These attitudes undoubtedly owed something to the relatively weaker tradition of mining in that coalfield, for in comparable terms wages, working conditions and housing were better in the Lothians than in most of Scotland's mining districts.

A major concern expressed in the report on the findings of the social survey on Scottish mining communities was the possibility that antagonism to mining had become so widespread and deeply rooted that improvements in material conditions, more mechanisation, better management might not in themselves make any beneficial impact on recruitment. The experience of the industry during the second World War and the miners' response to the prospect and reality of nationalisation largely confirmed that view. The key to the recruitment and retention of labour did not lie within the industry but within the social relationships between miners and the wider society.

CHAPTER SIX

The Miners and Mining: Changing Attitudes to Pit-Work in the Twentieth Century

Circumstances were dramatically changed in the mining industry by the prospect and onset of war. Coal and coal miners were once more vital to the national economy and the country could not get too much or too many of either commodity. Moreover, in the immediate post-war years demand remained high. The miner was then widely publicised as the key worker on whose goodwill, effort and skill economic recovery depended. Furthermore, Labour's landslide victory in the general election of 1945 ensured that the miners' long-held aspiration for nationalisation of the mines would become a reality, as it did on vesting day in January 1947.

During the war, and even more so after nationalisation, there were marked improvements in wages, hours and conditions in the pits. Job security became incomparably greater than it had been in the recent past. After 1947 managers no longer had the power of instant dismissal. Where mechanisation, rationalisation and modernisation reduced the need for labour, the National Coal Board (NCB) made every effort to redeploy men within the industry. From December 1948 it also operated a limited redundancy scheme.⁽¹⁾ Recruiting campaigns in the late 1940s and in the early 1950s emphasised not only the national importance of mining but also that it offered 'a job for life'. The industry, however, continued to be hampered by its labour supply problems.

1. The scheme was confined to men employed for not less than three years and it applied only to redundancy of an exceptional nature, as it was NCB policy to regard no mineworker as redundant until every effort to redeploy him in the industry had been made. Annual Reports and Proceedings, MFGB, 1948.

Mining did not become a more attractive occupation but, if anything, even less so than it had been in pre-war circumstances.

The second World War is not considered here in relation to the debate on war and social change, nor its long-term effects on the British working class.⁽²⁾ Nor is any attempt made to give a comprehensive account of the war-time history of the coal industry.⁽³⁾ The impact of war, particularly on the mobility of labour, is explored primarily as an influence on attitudes to pit work. The prospect and reality of nationalisation are discussed from the same perspective. The theme of the industrial and social status of mining is continued in a section that draws on material from various social surveys and Mass Observation enquiries of the late 1940s. In conclusion, various self-images and public images of "the miner" are identified and the changing relationship between miners as an occupational group and the wider society is commented on.

Miners participated to a high degree in the armed forces during the first World War⁽⁴⁾ and fears were expressed in early 1939 that the industry would again find its labour force diminishing at a time when increased output was vital for the war-effort. A writer in the Colliery Guardian pointed out that 'the miner, always a patriot if sometimes a difficult one, is prone to offer

2. See Harold Smith (ed.), War and Social Change. British Society in the Second World War (Manchester, 1986).

3. The standard work on this is the official history, WHB Court, History of the Second World War. Coal, HMSO (1951). See also Supple, British Coal Industry, vol. 4, p.p. 497-527

4. B.A. Waites, 'The effect of the First World War on class and status in England, 1910-20', Journal of Contemporary History, 11 (1976), p.p. 27-48, p.40

himself for active service without much thought for the consequences of withdrawing his labour'.⁽⁵⁾ Patriotism may well have inspired some miners to enlist but the evidence from Somerset⁽⁶⁾ indicates that the "push" factor (hostility to mining) was a strong motive for joining up or applying for work in the armaments factories.

The realisation that the attachment to mining had been seriously weakened in the generation of miners who had worked in the pits during the 1920s and 1930s⁽⁷⁾ prompted early attempts to avoid the somewhat chaotic conditions in mining that resulted from the improvisations of the first World War in its initial stages.⁽⁸⁾ In January 1939, the Government issued a schedule of reserved occupations. This did not completely restrict the movement of labour or preclude men in reserved occupations from taking part in some form of national service. However, the response to appeals for volunteers to the civil defence services in the coalfields was so poor that in March 1939 authoritative statements about the official interpretation of the schedule were issued. It was stated that its existence was meant merely as a warning that men in reserved occupations should not undertake any full-time service that would take them away from their normal employment.⁽⁹⁾ By May 1940 there were some 9,000 fewer wage earners on colliery books than there had been at the same date in the previous year. Since August 1939 the gross number leaving the

5. Colliery Guardian, April 14, 1939.

6. Above, p.251.

7. Court, Coal, p.27.

8. For the coal industry in the first World War see Supple, British Coal Industry, 'The Industry at War, 1914-16', p.p. 43-70.

9. Colliery Guardian, April 14, 1939.

industry was in the region of 65,000, of whom more than half were men of military age and sufficiently fit to be accepted for the forces.⁽¹⁰⁾ There had, in the same period, been an inflow of some 60,000 persons to the mines but in terms of experience, age and health standards the loss to the industry was more significant than the net-loss figure might suggest.

The continued drift of labour from the mines led to the extension to the industry of the Undertaking (Restriction on Engagement) Order in June 1940, which prohibited the employment of a man previously a miner (whether in work or unemployed) without the authority of the manager of his local labour exchange. The Order came rather belatedly, for many younger men had already left the pits. Moreover, the fall of France more or less coincided with the Order and it was relaxed almost as soon as it was implemented. The cut-off of trade with France dislocated exports to such an extent that unemployment increased rapidly in Durham, South Wales and other exporting districts. Meanwhile, with an attempted German invasion a distinct possibility in the near future, the forces were in desperate need of recruits to make up numbers lost at Dunkirk. In October 1940, therefore, the decision was taken to make miners up to the age of thirty, whether employed or not, available for call-up and free to volunteer for the services.⁽¹¹⁾

The decision was criticised in some quarters, particularly as difficulties with keeping up production were growing. Eventually, in May-June 1941, the Essential Work Order was applied to mining.

10. Court, Coal, pp. 131-32.

11. *ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

This made significant changes in the conditions of employment in the industry. It prohibited companies from freely dismissing men but, as WHB Court noted, it bound labour more closely to the collieries than at any time since the days of the annual bond in the north of England or the earlier period of serfdom in Scotland.⁽¹²⁾ The only way a miner could get out of the pits was through old age or by providing a medical certificate of unfitness.⁽¹³⁾ The Order did, however, give miners (for the first time since the 1914-18 war) a guaranteed wage whether or not they were working short-time although not during industrial disputes. The state, represented by a National Service Officer, now had powers to deal with habitual absentees.

Steps to recruit new labour (to supplement that now forcibly retained) were also taken. Reliance was initially placed on volunteer schemes. The Minister of Labour and National Service broadcast an appeal in June 1941 to 50,000 former miners to return to the pits. Once more, the response was poor. An embargo on further recruitment from mining for the forces was then introduced and it was decided that the Ministry should use its powers to direct ex-mining labour back to the industry. To determine the number of experienced miners now in other industries, all men under sixty who had worked for six months or more in the pits since January 1935 were required to register. Of the total 104,000 men who did so, 24,988 expressed a willingness to re-enter mining but once the unfit and those employed in essential production work were discounted the potential increase

12. *ibid.*, p. 140.

13. Court suggests that many miners who were probably fit enough to stay in the pits managed to gain their discharge by providing a medical certificate.

in mine workers was reduced. 23,057 men were placed in the pits under the scheme by October 1941 but natural wastage in the pre-existing labour force meant that the net increase in man power was only about 16,000.(14)

The attitudes of those who re-entered mining was almost certainly more complex than their 'willingness' suggests. Personal testimony from Somerset indicates that re-call was bitterly resented by some men, who went back only for fear of prosecution or imprisonment if they refused. Others went out of a begrudging sense of duty or because their new workmates became hostile to them and urged them to go back to mining to support the war effort. The restrictions imposed by the Essential Works Order made little difference to men who (because of age, apathy or attachment to mining) intended to stay in the industry anyway but the SMA agent's outspoken denunciation in 1939 of attempts to interfere with 'the rights of the miner' to put his labour where he liked(15) reflected a general antagonism to coercion. At local level, however, the union adopted a co-operative stance once war was a reality. In May 1943, for example, five SMA members from Bromley colliery applied to the union for legal representation at their appearance before the magistrates on charges of persistent absenteeism. After a lengthy discussion the SMA council resolved that 'the request be not complied with'.(16)

Meanwhile, the need to encourage young entrants to mining was still exercising the official mind. As early as 1942 it was noted that 'since it is unlikely that the coal mining industry will

14. Court, Coal, p.144.

15. Above p.252.

16. Minutes, Ludlows (Radstock) Lodge Committee (SMA. BUL.), May 14, 1943.

ever attract large numbers from other industries, it is essential that it should look to the recruitment of juveniles for the maintenance of its manpower'.⁽¹⁷⁾ The numbers of young persons in mining slumped even further in the first few years of war. Men under twenty-five were given the option of going into the pits when they were called up for military service, while voluntary entry was always open to those not liable for call up and engaged in non-essential work. Optants and volunteers were not forthcoming in sufficient numbers and from December 1943 the direction of youth operated under what became known (after Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour) as the 'Bevin boys' Scheme. The hope had been expressed in the Colliery Guardian in 1939 that the direction of labour would not (as in the first World War) entail 'the extravagant anomaly of employing graduate engineers in stokeholes and senior wranglers in cleaning out stables'.⁽¹⁸⁾ The method of choosing by ballot men for service in the pits ensured that Bevin boys were drawn from every class and all types of educational background. The names of all men due to register for national service at the end of 1943 or later went into the ballot. The only exemptions were a small minority on a short list of highly specialised occupations and those accepted as air crew or submarine artificers. Pit work was known to be widely unpopular and it was hoped that the ballot method would diminish the resentment of young men who found themselves turned

17. First Report of the Committee on the Recruitment of Juveniles in the Coalmining Industry (Non-Parliamentary), Ministry of Fuel and Power (1942), p. 174.

18. Colliery Guardian, April 14, 1939.

unwillingly into mineworkers. It is unlikely that it did so.⁽¹⁹⁾ One Bevin boy who later wrote of his experiences recalled his horrified disbelief at his fate. His family and friends reacted as if he had been given a harsh sentence of imprisonment for a crime he had not committed.⁽²⁰⁾ Nonetheless, between December 1943 and May 1945 (when compulsion was abolished as the war in Europe ended) just over 20,000 Bevin boys were directed into the mines.

There were improvements in mining in the war years, in addition to the guaranteed wage and removal of managerial powers of dismissal as mentioned above. Pit-head baths and canteens proliferated. In Somerset, where only two collieries had baths and there were no canteens in 1939, by 1945 every colliery had a canteen and more baths had been built.⁽²¹⁾ Much was done in the area of medical care for miners and in providing training for pit-work. Conciliation services were established and pit-production committees were set up, to involve the miner more directly in his work. A closed shop was more or less enforced. These measures (not always successful) represented the concessions that accompanied coercion but many miners were well aware of the motives that underlay them. The improvements in medical services, for example, were primarily aimed at a better rate of rehabilitation and a reduction in numbers getting out of the pits with a medical certificate of unfitness. Training schemes were forced into being by the labour shortage, for Bevin boys were virtually useless without training and a potential danger

19. See Court, Coal, 'The Direction of Youth', p.p. 302-08.

20. D. Day, The Bevin Boy, Kington, Warwickshire, (1975), p.6.

21. Regional Survey, Bristol and Somerset, p.p. 70-72.

underground to themselves and others. Miners were often cynical about attempts to win their co-operation and goodwill, as they were also about managements' sudden enthusiasm for them all to join the union. Two substantial wage awards⁽²²⁾ distinctly improved the miners' position in comparison to the low standards of the pre-war years but, as Court has noted, this was widely regarded as the putting right of past wrongs.

Court has written perceptively on the functions and meaning of the wage rate to miner heads of household as, indeed, he has on the general subject of the miners' attitudes and response to war-time circumstances and measures.⁽²³⁾ The key point to emerge from his analysis is that the general public failed utterly to understand the miners' situation. Military conscription and the direction of labour were of course widely-shared experiences but the depth of hostility to mining (and, more particularly, the reasons for it) was not generally recognised. The miners were, on the whole, thought to have done better in terms of concessions and improved working conditions than most other sections and the Porter award gave them the highest minimum wage of any occupational group. Yet the coal industry continued to be wracked by industrial unrest, strikes, falling productivity, growing absenteeism. The tendency of public opinion therefore was 'either to regard the mineworker as a disaffected member of the community and in some degree unpatriotic and disloyal, or to look upon him as a strange being whose motives were somehow different from those of other men'.⁽²⁴⁾

22. The Greene award in 1942 and the Porter award in 1945. See Court, Coal, p.p. 223-24 and 251-69.

23. Court, Coal, 'The Mining Community', p.p. 323-33.

24. *ibid.*, p. 328.

This lack of public understanding and the fact that the miners were often the target for abusive attacks in the press during the war, especially when productivity did not increase after wage rises, was one more factor in the miners' growing discontent with mining. In spite of all the emergency measures to retain and recruit labour, the workforce continued to decline. The average number of wage earners in the Somerset coalfield, for example, fell from 3,306 in 1938 to 2,948 in 1944.⁽²⁵⁾ Labour-supply prospects in the post-war years were not good for although numbers entering the industry were expected to increase as demobilised men returned from the forces, there was less certainty about the choices that former Somerset miners in essential war industries might make:

The latter is difficult to assess without knowledge as to the extent to which men will become redundant as war production ceases and also of the use to be made of these factories in the future and wages paid. As long as that work is available under existing conditions, it is believed that most of the men will elect to remain in the factories rather than return voluntarily to mining.⁽²⁶⁾

Moreover, Mass Observation surveys of Blaina and Nantyglo in South Wales in 1942 revealed that the decline in unemployment and the general rise in purchasing power in the mining communities had not engendered unqualified optimism or confidence over the industry's long-term future.⁽²⁷⁾ The persistent memory of the experiences of the 1920s and 1930s and the fact that directed labour, with its frustrations and resentments, was proportionally higher in mining than in any other industry made it highly likely

25. Regional Survey, Bristol and Somerset, p. 25.

26. *ibid.*, p. 57.

27. 'Mining Town - 1942', Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, File Report No. 1498. Quoted in Supple, British Coal Industry, Vol. 4, p. 578. (The Archive Assistant stated in June 1988 that the Blaina-Nantyglo survey would probably be published in the near future).

that there would be a drastic outflow of labour from the pits once restrictions on mobility were lifted.

Nonetheless, some factors were potentially favourable to recruitment after the war. The social and economic position of the miners was indisputably improved during the war years. Furthermore, the NUM (as the MFGB became after reorganisation in January 1945) had sufficient authority to justify confidence in gaining further improvements once the war ended.⁽²⁸⁾ Above all, Labour's electoral victory in 1945 meant that the mines would be nationalised. The unions had campaigned for this since the 1890s and many miners shared the view of A.J. Parfitt, who argued in his memoirs written in 1930 that nationalisation would mean better management, improved safety, higher output, lower costs and a better standard of living for the miners. It was not, Parfitt claimed, that miners wanted 'to run the industry in their own interests' but that state ownership would benefit the whole society.⁽²⁹⁾ As one research student has noted, many commentators have argued that enthusiasm for nationalisation was rapidly translated to disillusionment once it became a reality in 1947. However, her research in progress leads her to suggest that in parts of South Wales nationalisation was, for decades after 1947, regarded as a great advance.⁽³⁰⁾ Miners' attitudes and response to state-ownership were undoubtedly varied and liable to change

28. Supple, British Coal Industry, Vol.4., p. 577.

29. Parfitt, Somerset Miner, p. 45.

30. I. Zweiniger 'Attitudes towards Nationalisation of the Coal Industry and its Impact on Industrial Relations in South Wales: Oakdale Colliery and Penrikyber Colliery, 1945-1957', unpublished paper presented to the Conference on Mining in Great Britain and in the Ruhr, University of the Ruhr, Bochum, West Germany, December 1986. Forthcoming Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge.

over time⁽³¹⁾ but in Somerset, as in South Wales, criticism of some aspects of NCB policy co-existed with a widely held and long lasting belief that nationalisation was right in principle and, furthermore, that it brought substantial improvements to the industry.⁽³²⁾ As an influence on attitudes to pit-work in the late 1940s, however, the prospect of nationalisation was of little significance.

Just after the Bill to nationalise the mines had received the royal assent in the autumn of 1946 the survey concerned with the recruitment of boys to mining was carried out.⁽³³⁾ The matter was therefore a topic of current debate, although actual plans for the method of reorganisation existed only in very broad outline. 98 per cent of mining fathers interviewed at that time knew that the state was taking over the industry but only 77 per cent of their wives said they knew of this, an even smaller proportion than the 79 per cent of non-mining parents who were aware of the forthcoming changes. Over half of all the boys interviewed knew of it but awareness was not particularly high, even among boys at work in the mines. Out of a total of 317 in this category, 64 per cent knew that nationalisation was underway.⁽³⁴⁾ Parents alone were asked if they knew how the Government was going to take over the mines and any reference to the NCB was considered sufficient to make the answer affirmative. On this basis, less than half the mining fathers and even smaller

31. See P. Pagnamenta and R. Overy, All Our Working Lives (1984), p.p.183-87; for the 1930s see A.J.Taylor, 'The Miners and Nationalisation, 1931-36', Int. Rev. of Soc. Hist., Vol.28(1983), p.p.176-199.

32. P. Bonsall, 'The Decline of the Somerset Coalfield, 1947-1973', M.A., University of Warwick (1984), passim.

33. RG 23/ 85 (Social Survey, PRO),

34. *ibid.*, p. 18.

proportions of mining mothers and non-mining parents knew how it was to be done.⁽³⁵⁾ Three out of four mining fathers thought that nationalisation would make mining a better job, as did lower but still major proportions of those in other categories. The principle reasons given for this view were that material conditions would improve, management and organisation would be more efficient, there would be greater 'fair play' and generally better treatment of miners, who would be working for themselves and the country rather than for its coal owners.

Yet when those interviewed were asked if nationalisation would alter their attitude to mining as an occupation it became apparent that, except among mining fathers, the prospect of radical change had only a small effect. One in three of mining fathers said it altered their attitude but only one in six mining mothers and non-mining parents and an even smaller proportion of boys said so.

In each group there were a few individuals who were in favour of mining anyway, nationalised or not, but most of those uninfluenced by the change were opposed to pit-work. Miners who did not want their sons to go into the industry said more frequently than other categories that nationalisation might change their attitude favourably but, nonetheless, only one in six mining parents as a whole changed their opinion in this way.⁽³⁶⁾

This response did not augur well for the future recruitment of boys. Moreover, the prospect of nationalisation seems to have had

35. *ibid.*, p. 55.

36. *ibid.*, p.p. 18-19, p.p. 56-60.

little effect on the attitudes of men already disaffected towards the industry. The Minister of Fuel and Power wrote to the Prime Minister in September 1946 to explain what was being done to get unemployed miners back into the pits in South Wales.⁽³⁷⁾ Numbers of unemployed persons aged sixteen and over had increased slowly in South Wales and Monmouthshire from 5,185 in October 1945 to 6,248 in July 1946. The Ministry of Labour supplied details of out-of-work miners who were fit for light work only and also of those physically capable of 'more arduous underground work' but for whom the department had not been able to find jobs. The Ministry of Fuel and Power then undertook to 'try to persuade colliery companies to offer employment to both categories of men'.

It was pointed out to the Prime Minister that the prevalence of disabilities caused special difficulties, because 'the mining industry gives rise to considerably more incapacity than it provides jobs which incapacitated men can reasonably be expected to perform'.⁽³⁸⁾ Moreover, reorganisation of surface plants had led to progressively fewer vacancies for the lighter type of work which unfit men were able to do. Nonetheless, an intensive drive had been undertaken in December 1945 to identify and place in employment those of the 5,679 men then out of work who were regarded as fit for underground jobs in the mines. Ministry of Labour officials reported that only 357 men might be suitable but the Minister of Fuel and Power's regional labour director

37. PREM 8/40 (PRO), Letter from the Minister of Fuel and Power to the Prime Minister, September 19, 1946.

38. On the extent to which the industry functioned as a "sheltered workshop" for disabled miners after 1947 see J. Sewel, Colliery Closure and Social Change: a study of a South Wales mining valley (Cardiff, 1975).

decided, on further investigation, that no more than 251 men could be considered fit enough for underground mine-work. Out of this total of 251, however, 222 men 'flatly refused to work underground or even on the surface'. The state of their health was offered as an explanation for their refusal by seventy-four men but the other 148 gave unspecified reasons for their objections to mining. The remaining twenty-nine men were satisfactorily placed in the industry.

Coercion was again used, albeit in more subtle forms than under the Essential Work Order of the war years. Officials from the Ministries of Labour and of Fuel and Power interviewed all fit, unemployed men in the mining districts 'with a view to inducing them to take work in the pits'.⁽³⁹⁾ As a last resort, such men had their unemployment benefit withheld if after three months out of work they still refused to go into mining. There was, however, concern at the highest level of government that decisions to deprive the able-bodied of welfare benefits were often not upheld by Courts of Referees in the coalfields, to which men had a right of appeal. Suspicion of what were regarded as over-sympathetic attitudes to men hostile to mining prompted a Cabinet subcommittee to suggest in 1946 that what was needed in the coalfields was 'a change in personnel... transfer of officials and [the] introduction of fresh minds'.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Indeed, Labour in power displayed an increasingly authoritarian attitude to the mining workforce and the leadership of the NUM was perfectly willing to co-operate with some measures aimed at

39. CAB 128/5 (PRO), Report of the chairman of the Ministerial Committee on Coal During the Coming Winter, September 17, 1946.

40. *ibid.*

disciplining and controlling labour in the pits. In August 1947 the Minister of Fuel and Power reported to the Cabinet that private conversations with the NUM secretary indicated that the union would 'raise no objections' if the NCB took legal action against persistent absentees, on the grounds of breach of contract. What is more, he went on to explain that he believed the Coal Board might well be able to recover substantial damages for loss of revenue from men who technically broke their contracts by not working regularly. He also considered that the NCB would be justified in taking action for damages against any man suspected of restricting output by using go-slow tactics. Here again, he was able to state with confidence that the NUM at national level would support such action. In the autumn of 1947, the Cabinet decided that 'a firmer line' must be taken with the miners.⁽⁴¹⁾ At local level, managers were particularly concerned about getting full co-operation in the recruitment drive from miners and their unions. A Nottinghamshire colliery manager told the writer Ferdinand Zweig in 1947 that 'at the present time they seem to obstruct the recruitment drive, drawing a dark and repulsive picture of the miner's job, and discouraging everyone from going down who would be willing to do so.' He believed the main reason for this was that miners did not want to see an end to the shortage of labour in the pits, because 'as long as there is one man to two jobs they can have their own way', but he added that in his opinion no amount of propaganda would convince the miners that unemployment was a thing of the past. Fear of the dole 'haunts them still', he said.⁽⁴²⁾

41. CAB 128/10 (PRO) Cabinet Conclusions, August 17, 1947, Minute 2, 'Coal'.

42. Zweig, Men in the Pits, p.140.

To an ardent trade-union leader, committed to nationalisation and to the Labour government, the reluctant miner was breaching solidarity by acts of disloyalty equivalent to those of a strike-breaker but the NCB's tougher style of management by the end of the 1940s may well have had a dispiriting effect on miners who were doing their best. The agent in Somerset⁽⁴³⁾ repeatedly called for greater efforts in the workplace and reminded the miners of their responsibility for the success or failure of the Labour government. There were no prosecutions in Somerset for "ca'canny"; absenteeism was the lowest in the country and the men initially co-operated in working overtime to increase output.

Eventually, after a period of three months, they decided (in common with the miners of Kent and Nottinghamshire) to work no more overtime for the following four months. This may well have been because of resentment at what was seen, in effect, as enforced extra work. Certainly the Ludlows (Radstock) Lodge committee had objections, which were expressed in the minutes of their meeting in August 1949, which noted the feeling in the pit that 'it was taking unfair liberties, to TELL men that they must work alternative Saturdays, before consulting the men'.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Even before the NCB officially took control of the pits, however, there were signs that labour supply was likely to be a major handicap to its future. Of the 23,000 former miners demobilised

43. D. R. Llewellyn was appointed SMA agent in April 1945. The executive decided initially that the council should appoint an agent from a short-list of four (only one of whom was from Somerset), the appointment to be then 'recommended' to the members. A resolution subsequently passed in council led to a general meeting attended by all lodge-committee members, at which Llewellyn was unanimously chosen as agent.

44. Minutes, Ludlows (Radstock) Lodge Committee (SMA, BUL), August 19, 1949.

by February 1946 almost 40 per cent did not go back to the pits. Out of 5,000 unemployed men in the coalfields only 1,000 were willing to consider mining in the summer of 1946 and of 242 unemployed men in other areas only six agreed to enter mining.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Proposals to increase food rations for underground workers went on sporadically throughout 1946 until September of that year. The Board of Trade then agreed that as an incentive to production extra household goods and utensils could be released to the mining communities. Bedding, wallpaper, galvanised baths, scrubbing brushes and 29,000 "demob" suits surplus to the requirements of the armed forces were made available to miners and their families. As A.J. Robertson has noted, what effect on productivity the distribution of 29,000 "demob" suits with accessories actually had on output was unfortunately not recorded.⁽⁴⁶⁾

In the same year the Treasury agreed to the Ministry of Information sponsoring a monthly one-reel film magazine to be distributed mainly through 'news theatres' in the coalfields.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The script for the October 1947 issue indicates that it was not explicitly a recruiting appeal but no doubt it was intended to make parents in the mining communities look more favourably on mining as an occupation for their sons. It was primarily a propaganda exercise aimed at boosting morale by publicising improvements in mining and the national importance of the

45. A. J. Robertson, The Bleak Midwinter 1947 (Manchester 1987), p.47.

46. *ibid.*, p.49.

47. INF/6/386/(PRO). Delays in production curtailed the nine issues planned for January to September 1947 to only five. Publicity thereafter was the responsibility of the NCB. No more issues were made after the script referred to here, which is dated October 10, 1947.

industry. The sub-text emphasised the unity of interest between the NCB and the workforce. The opening shot was to be of the NCB flag unfurling over a colliery while the voice-over commentator announced 'Today, we salute the miners who have the tremendous task of bringing coal to us in this day of need'. Topics highlighted were increasing mechanisation and the five day week. The reel ended with a soloist singing 'The Miner's Song', backed by a male-voice choir accompanied by Stanley Black and his dance orchestra. The credits gave prominence to the mining connections of some of those involved in the production. The song had been written by Carol Lewis, 'miner's son'; arranged by Hal Evans, 'ex-miner'; sung by James Etherington, 'Durham miner's son'. How all this was received in the mining communities can only be guessed at but it was as likely to be seen as deeply patronising as it was to be welcomed as some sort of recognition of the miners' worth.

Nonetheless, the project represented a sincere attempt to enhance the miners' self-respect. The industrial and social status of the miners was by now recognised as a key factor in the recruiting problem. It attracted considerable attention in the social surveys of the late 1940s and also from the Mass Observation organisation. Post-war coal shortages reached crisis point in the bitter winter weather of early 1947, when difficulties with supply and distribution created an additional strain on the patience of a war-weary population that was still coping with rationing, general shortages and often appalling housing conditions. In the period from April 1947 to April 1948, Mass Observation tested almost continuously the reaction of the public

to mining and the miners. Some 50 per cent of the people interviewed at the end of those twelve months thought that the fuel crisis had been handled well. Those who denounced the industry for inefficiency (often in emphatic terms) were motivated largely by political sentiment. That is, they were opposed to state ownership, or to socialism, or to the Labour government - very often, to all three.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Nonetheless, the general public evidently continued to feel that major concessions had been made to the miners and that they were not responding as well as they might have done. This feeling was exemplified by a man who said, around the spring of 1947:

They've got their five-day week and they're still grumbling. What more do they want? I wish I had a five-day week but I'm only a poor bloody office worker. They're all the same. They'll never be satisfied.⁽⁴⁹⁾

In August 1946, however, a pit disaster at Whitehaven killed 104 miners. The usual upsurge of public sympathy was immediately reflected in a different attitude to the miners: You can say what you like about the miners but they earn every penny they get.

Over the next few days, the national press publicised unofficial strike action in some coalfields and the pendulum of opinion swung rapidly against the miners once more:

The country's in this bloody mess
and the miners are out on strike
again. It makes me sick !

48. 'The Miner on the Hearth' (April 1948), Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, File Report No. 2997.

49. *ibid.*, p.2. See also Zweig, Men in the Pits, *passim*. In the course of his inquiries (carried out between July and October 1947) in thirteen coalfields Zweig talked to several hundreds of boys and men of all grades in the industry and also to miners' wives and other working people in the mining community.

The miners were generally seen as a 'pampered' occupational group. They were regarded as having been given more 'perks' than other groups and there was some resentment about their special treatment in terms of attention to their grievances and difficulties and the stream of publicity about their vital importance to the country. These feelings were especially strong in non-mining areas, where recruiting posters offering a weekly wage of £10 in the pits provoked much hostility. A typical comment was:

Alright, aint it, being a miner ?
Ten quid a week, more food,
more this, more that. I'm in
the wrong ruddy job, I am.

The posters, needless to say, did not explain what the chances were of a miner earning this optimum wage. Many people interpreted it as a minimum wage or at least an average wage and therefore thought that miners were on a high wage by the standards of the time, yet still dissatisfied.⁽⁵⁰⁾

As for the miners themselves, their verbal responses suggest that even if the general public thought that their status had risen since 1939,⁽⁵¹⁾ they still thought of themselves as looked down upon by those outside the mining fraternity:

It doesn't matter where you go, the
miners' not thought of as being anything.
You feel smeared with an inferiority
complex all your life. The miner always
feels he's a shilling or one and sixpence
in the pound short.⁽⁵²⁾

Moreover, prejudice (or the perception of prejudice) seems to have changed very little over time. A.J. Parfitt recalled in his

50. *ibid*, *passim*.

51. 'The Miner on the Hearth', *passim*

52. *ibid.*, p.7.

memoirs that during a particularly violent strike in Somerset in 1908⁽⁵³⁾ a press-photographer from a London daily paper had accosted him and other members of the pit lodge committee with the query 'Could you tell me where I could get a photo of the ----- strikers'. Told that they, the men in front of him, were miners on strike:

He laughed and said "You're not miners".
Assuring him that we were, he again replied "What, with collars and ties... I was informed you were a hooligan set of men".

He took a photograph, nonetheless, but Parfitt later wrote 'The men waited eagerly for the papers the next morning but no photo appeared - it was too respectable'.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Nearly forty years later, another miner recounted a somewhat similar experience, when he apparently did not fit the perceived image of a miner:

I'll tell you what happened when I went for my holidays at a certain place some years ago. The Landlady asked us to join a party they were having. We started talking about our work. When I said I was a miner, it came as a real shock to them. They said I hadn't given the impression I was a miner.⁽⁵⁵⁾

As the report on this survey pointed out, the public perception of miners was complex and volatile while the miners had a more persistent perception of themselves as misunderstood, misrepresented and generally undervalued. The possibility of mining publicity 'misfiring' and 'confusing' public opinion was noted but a case was made for 'using the past to explain the present to the general public and perhaps to the miner himself'.⁽⁵⁶⁾

53. At Dunkerton colliery in 1908. See Down and Warrington, History of the Somerset Coalfield, p.p. 120-24

54. Parfitt, Somerset Miner, p.p. 23-4.

55. 'The Miner on the Hearth', p.7.

56. *ibid.*, p. 9.

Throughout 1947 events in the industry kept mining firmly in the public eye. By the end of that year the conception of the miner as industry's key worker was widely (though not always unresentfully) accepted by the public. In the spring of 1948, Mass Observation surveyed a cross-section of opinion in London for the purpose of identifying personal attitudes to miners and mining. The questionnaires made no reference to what was topically happening in the industry but asked people how they 'felt' about miners, if they knew any, how they thought of the prospect of pit work for themselves and if they knew what a miner might reasonably expect to take home in his pay packet. Equal numbers of men and women, of those over and under forty, were interviewed, drawn from three socio-economic groupings defined by Mass Observation as 'middle, artisan and working class'.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Public opinion was often sharply divided over controversial issues in the industry but the survey revealed emphatic approval for the miner and for the way he was doing his job. The miners' 'supporters' were nearly three times as many as his critics and levels of sympathy were much the same in both age groups and in each social category. It was noted that middle-class opinion was often assumed to be predominantly anti-miner but the responses indicated that although middle-class woman, in particular, were rather more inclined to hostile attitudes a considered and reasoned sympathy for the miners was more likely to be expressed by the middle-class as a whole than by other groups. Remarks and comments on pit work were made 'not in very knowledgeable

57. 'London Viewpoint' (Published in Coal April 1948), Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, File Report No. 2585, p.p.1-2.

fashion' and it was concluded that public opinion was 'underinformed' about many aspects of mining although 'not widely mis-informed' about average wage levels. Substantial numbers of people (especially among women and those respondents from the working class) were unable to hazard a guess at what a miner might earn. Those who most often gave the nearly-correct answer (up to £6) were working in skilled trades. There were some respondents who felt a wage of about £6 a week was too low, in view of the dangers and difficulties of the job. An army officer's wife, for example, suggested that £12 to £15 was what 'they deserve' for such hard work.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Fewer than one in ten of those interviewed were unable to say how they felt about miners and it was suggested in the report that the 'Don't Knows' included many who were puzzled rather than ignorant. As in the earlier Mass Observation survey, there was evidently a feeling that the miners had 'got what they wanted' - nationalisation, a shorter week, better wages - yet strikes and absenteeism persisted and productivity did not apparently increase. The miners, some said, were 'asking too much' or 'won't work'. A twenty-five year old woman singer declared 'I think they're only a lot of idlers, myself'. Outright criticism like this was rare and much less frequent than unqualified praise. More typical than either was the ambivalence illustrated in the comment of the sixty year old wife of a wine merchant:

I think they're marvellous people. We couldn't do without them. But I don't think while we're in this mess we're in they should have these strikes. I think its disgusting.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Two out of every five Londoners interviewed had had some personal

58. *ibid.*, p.p. 5-7.

59. *ibid.*, p. 4.

contact with miners. They had worked with them in non-mining jobs or in the forces, met them casually in London or when themselves visiting mining areas. Others knew something of work and life in the coalfields from getting to know miners' relatives who had moved to the city. Only one person who had actually met miners made any criticism of them as a group and all other comments, from men and women in each class, were uniformly favourable. 'They're a nice class of men', as one working-class woman put it, 'MUCH nicer than some people seem to think !'.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Although the survey showed the existence of much good-will towards miners it also revealed that general public knowledge about mining was surprisingly limited, given the publicity that the industry had attracted in the 1920s and 1930s, during the war and in the immediate post-war years. However Mass Observation findings confirmed those of other surveys about the unwillingness of men to consider mining as an occupation. Asked how they felt about this, only one man in ten said he 'would'nt mind' or 'if necessary' would work in the pits. Four out of every five were certain that they would not like to be a miner. Most men found the idea of having to work underground particularly unpleasant. The dangers of mining and the perceived image of mining communities as dreary places were mentioned but the hard and difficult nature of the work was the main determining factor in shaping attitudes. Considerable admiration was expressed for those who were up to the 'man's job' of pit work but no matter how strongly Londoners' felt that miners were 'grand fellows' doing 'a hell of a job', they did not think that anyone who had any choice in the matter would willingly go into mining.⁽⁶¹⁾ As

60. *ibid.*, p. 8.

61. *ibid.*, p. 9.

the report concluded, it seemed there was still a long way to go before pit-work was likely to be accepted as a possible and interesting job for someone not 'born to it'.⁽⁶²⁾

Official concern over the general reputation of mining among the potential recruits to the industry prompted another social survey, of 1,870 men between the ages of sixteen and sixty-four who were working outside the coal industry.⁽⁶³⁾ The sample was drawn from towns and rural districts throughout Great Britain and the field work was completed in February 1948. Most working men had a clear idea of the problems facing the coal industry, notably the shortage of manpower. Nationalisation and the intensification of mechanisation were widely believed to have improved mining, or that they would make it better in the future. The majority of men considered wages and hours better in mining than in their own jobs but they were emphatically of the opinion that in terms of working conditions and physical effort their own occupations were preferable.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The image of a mining community as sombre, dirty, depressing and characterised by poor housing persisted. Most men thought a mining district would be worse to live in than the place where they lived at the time of interview.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The general tendency to reinforce the findings of earlier surveys extended to attitudes to the miners and to pit-work as an occupation for themselves or their sons. Miners were widely regarded as decent, hard-working men doing a rotten job. The social standing of miners was believed to have risen considerably in recent years. Nearly half those interviewed

62. *ibid.*, p. 10.

63. RG 23/129A (Social Survey, PRO), 'Men and Mining' (1948).

64. *ibid.*, p. 1.

65. *ibid.*, p.p. 1-2.

thought it right that miners should have some degree of preferential treatment over rationed goods or items in short supply.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Asked to make a choice of jobs from five vital services and industries only 5 per cent chose mining and this was the least popular occupation of those named. In the age-group from which the industry was then recruiting (sixteen to thirty-four) only 4 per cent indicated a willingness to go into the pits. About 8 per cent of men with sons aged fourteen to eighteen were in favour of them entering mining.⁽⁶⁷⁾ This was much the same proportion as non-mining parents who were willing to let their children go into the industry in 1946,⁽⁶⁸⁾ which suggests that nationalisation, the improvements associated with it and high-level publicity and recruiting campaigns had made virtually no difference to attitudes over a period of some two years.

Early on in the Labour administration attempts were made to mitigate the manpower shortages in mining by recruiting among displaced eastern European groups and by directing Irish labour (entering the U.K., without restriction, from the Irish Free State⁽⁶⁹⁾) into the mines. The chairman of a ministerial committee concerned with the problem noted in September 1946 that over half the unemployment in the country was concentrated in the mining districts, at a time when the pits were 'crying out for labour'. He did, however, acknowledge that many of these unemployed men were 'old or unfit'. Furthermore, lack of housing was holding up the transfer of miners from Lanarkshire to Fife and also causing

66. Mass Observation recorded a similar responses ; see 'The Miner on the Hearth', p.p. 3-4

67. 'Men and Mining', p.p. 11-13.

68. RG23/85, Recruitment of Boys to the Mining Industry.

69. Ministry of Labour officials were instructed to 'encourage' Irish immigrants to take work in the pits.

'difficulties' about bringing in Irish labour.(70)

The Ministry of Fuel and Power had, by August 1946, traced 200 skilled Polish miners who were willing to volunteer for pit-work. A further one to two or even three thousand men were prepared to undergo training.(71) The NUM 'raised difficulties' at the prospect of foreign labour but the numbers were so comparatively small and the need so great that the government view was that it was 'out of the question that we should allow the NUM to pursue an obstinate policy of this kind'.(72) Opposition persisted in some mining districts but in Somerset (the first coalfield to receive foreign labour) the 500 or so Poles sent to the mines in 1947 and 1948(73) were assimilated without conflict. Indeed, so successful was the local experiment that Somerset miners were held up as an example to other NCB areas and to other industries. The Poles, however, proved as eager to get out of the pits as their British counterparts were. Volunteering for the mines was one way to get into "civvy street" and acquire a British passport but by the end of 1954 only ninety-eight Polish men were still working in the Somerset mines.(74) Nor did the Irish show any marked attachment to mining as an occupation. It was officially noted that Irish labour 'was, of course, untrained' but facilities existed to absorb some 150 men a week into six-week training courses in various coalfields. It was believed that 'it would not be too difficult' to persuade managers to take

70. CAB 128/5 (PRO), Reports of Ministerial Committee, September 17, 1946.

71. CAB 128/5.

72. CAB 128/5.

73. Powe 20/116 (PRO), March 1948.

74. J.F.Davis. 'Changes in the Bristol Somerset Coalfield', Geography, 4, (1956). p.p. 57-8.

this labour. At the beginning of August 1946 between 1,200 and 1,500 firm 'promises' had been made by potential Irish recruits and it was thought possible that between 2,000 and 3,000 Irish men could be placed in the industry by the end of the year.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The Irish however, as Robertson has noted, showed a marked tendency to decamp to the midland car factories at the earliest opportunity.⁽⁷⁶⁾

Later attempts by the NCB to compensate for national and local shortages of labour were no more successful. The indication from the survey of the Scottish mining communities in 1944 that men were likely to move from the coalfields if migration offered the possibility of alternative employment was confirmed by experiences in Somerset in the 1960s. Men transferred from Scotland and, in greater numbers, from County Durham left mining very quickly once they were in an area of high employment and with a diversifying economy. Indeed, between 1960 and 1965-6, a period when there were no pit closures in Somerset, the mining labour force declined by some 60 per cent. The origins of the labour supply problem lay, however, not in post-war socio-economic change but in the past history of the mining industry. More particularly, it lay in the changing attitudes of miners to mining and in the relationship between the occupational group and the wider society.

The miners at the end of the nineteenth century were an inward-looking group, often socially and psychologically isolated even if not geographically so. Many communities had, like Radstock, been transformed in the course of the century. The violent

75. CAB 128/5, Minutes, August 2, 1946.

76. Robertson, Bleak Midwinter, p.165

squalor of the town in 1799⁽⁷⁷⁾ was far removed from the modest respectability that Dr. Stewart found in the coalfield in 1842.⁽⁷⁸⁾ By then, heavy drinking was much less common than it had been. Most elderly men were illiterate but some of the younger ones and the boys had learned to read and write at Methodist Sunday schools. Social progress continued with the formation of the Co-op in the 1860s, of the union in the 1870s. State education was a part of the process and extensions to the franchise in the 1880s enabled miners to take part in local government and administration. In parliament, some mining constituencies were represented in the later nineteenth century by men of their own class and occupational background. Where circumstances were unfavourable (as in Somerset) to the return of Lib-Lab MPs, the miners remained generally content with the Liberal party until the first decades of the twentieth century.

With the continued growth of the coal industry and employment available for virtually every boy born into the mining community there was little incentive to break with tradition and put a son to other work. With limited mobility and few alternatives, aspirations were, in any case, unlikely to be fulfilled. What is more, relatively high wages in most coalfields were a compensation for the conditions of work. Even in the low-wage Somerset coalfield, miners were likely to consider their industrial and social position as better than that of the farm labourer. If wider comparisons were made, they were likely to be with other mining areas rather than other occupations. Moreover,

77. Revd. Warner, A Tour Through The South Western Counties (1799) p.10

78. Dr. Stewart's report to the R.C on Coal Mines 1842, p.p. 49-53.

miners could look to their union for financial aid at times of unemployment, short-time working or industrial disputes. It was also the union rather than outside agencies that provided a range of assistance, from train-fares to find work in other areas to loans or mortgages for house purchases. The miner may have felt himself looked down on socially and regarded as something of an oddity by the general populace - a man in moleskins, with pit-blackened face and coal-scarred skin, who earned his living in the darkness below ground. Within his own world, that mattered little and if he gave any serious thought to how the rest of society felt about "the miners" he was surely as likely (before the first World War) to be contemptuous of their ignorance as he was to be irritated by their prejudice or misunderstanding.

Images of the miner shifted and changed according to circumstances, as the Mass Observation surveys found, but they were also shaped by prejudice. Hero of the class struggle or the enemy within (as in 1926 and again in 1984-5), images of the miner ranged from the bestial to the superman. Take the miner at the coal face, for example:

The miner's work is essentially of a rough, coarse nature. He has to move stealthily...when[he] hacks and tears at the coal, he often makes growling, worrying noises...his attitude towards the coal at the face is reminiscent of a beast of prey at a "kill".(79)

That description, written by a post-graduate student in the early 1930s, is in marked contrast to Orwell's hymn of praise to the

79. W.H.Davis, 'The Influence of Recent Changes in the Social Environment on the Outlook and Habits of Individuals, with special reference to the mining community in South Wales', M.A., University of Cardiff (1933), p. 74.

spectacle of men at the face:

It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realise what splendid men they are. Most of them are small...but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies... No one could do their work who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for a guardsman at that...⁽⁸⁰⁾

To the miner, however, his job was an ordinary man's job, neither essentially degrading nor requiring superhuman strength and courage. Miners saw themselves as 'ordinary men' whose occupation had been largely forced on them by circumstances.⁽⁸¹⁾ Similarly, a thirty-six year old wife of a Welsh miner (and mother of one child) wrote in the late 1930s that she was 'quite satisfied with life' but not with her surroundings or with her material conditions. A more comfortable home and a bigger family would, she wrote, 'make our happiness complete.'⁽⁸²⁾ It is likely that many women in the mining communities shared this modest hope of finding fulfilment in women's traditional roles and that few welcomed the 'heroism' forced on them by circumstances despite the sympathetic comments of H. V. Morton, who wrote in 1931:

The human drama of South Wales is the heroism of its women. The women in countless thousands of homes are holding the black valleys together. Their courage is magnificent.⁽⁸³⁾

As a final illustration of patronising condescension towards the miner, consider Arthur Bryant's comments in his preface to Coal-Miner, written by an unemployed miner from Nottinghamshire,

80. G. Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (1937); Penguin edition (1986), p.21.

81. RG 23/ 129A, Men and Mining, p.2.

82. G. Armbruster, 'The Social Determination of Ideologies: Being a Study of a Welsh Mining Community', Ph.D, University of London (1940), p.261. Pages 261-276 give the written responses of men and women, in the form of 'essays', to such titles as 'what I think of Life'.

83. Daily Herald, June 24, 1931.

George Tomlinson. Byrant describes their first meeting at a summer school in the spring of 1936:

He comes of mining stock and looks it...[but]...having borrowed a suit of clothes from a brother in good employment in London, his appearance at the moment, for all the angular splendour of his physique, scarcely suggested a coal-miner. He told me he had been looking for books in the College Library...to my surprise, for he did not look a bookish fellow, I gathered from his talk that he knew a good deal about them.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Attitudes to mining, reflected in the varied images and stereotypes of the miner, probably changed little over time. More significantly, between the wars the miners' awareness of the often unfavourable characteristics of his job and his community grew. What is more, the generation of miners who lived through the 1920s and 1930s experienced a collective loss of self esteem, a decline in whatever degree of pride they might once have felt. The Lancashire miner who told George Orwell in 1937 that the housing shortage in that coalfield first became acute 'when we were told about it'⁽⁸⁵⁾ was, as Orwell noted, representative of many others who had unquestioningly taken for granted conditions that seemed intolerable once comparisons were made beyond the coalfields. The effects of the inter-war years of depression on miners' attitudes to mining cannot be over-stressed. Miners have traditionally proved adept at evoking sympathy from the rest of the working class and from the general public, by references to the 'blood on the coal'⁽⁸⁶⁾ or similarly emotive images. It is, however, one thing to use such tactics for the purpose of gaining

84. G. Tomlinson, Coal-Miner (1937), p. 7.

85. Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 57.

86. Herbert Smith, President of the MFGB, used the image in evidence to the Buckmaster Court of Inquiry on Wages in 1924, quoted in Supple, British Coal Industry, Vol.4. p. 426.

support or sympathy but quite a different matter when they are taken at face value by the public. What is more, between the wars the projected self-image of the miners as a 'community of misfortune, a fellowship of poverty, a Guild of Grief'(87) became uncomfortably close to reality. As WHB Court commented, 'It was probably the first time that the miner really awoke to his isolation from the rest of the world. It was the first time that he had found it a disadvantage'.(88)

87. R. Dataller, From a Pitman's Note-Book (1925), p. 158.

88. Court, Coal p. 325.

Conclusion

The labour supply problem of the coal industry in the post-nationalisation years had its origin in the decades before the second World War. Even before the first World War, changes in the regulations governing the employment of boys underground were causing a fall-off in juvenile recruitment in Somerset and in the other small coalfields of south-west England. Falling birth rate in the mining population as a whole (particularly after 1927, in response to adverse economic circumstances) reduced the number of potential recruits but there were other factors that contributed to the break down of the tradition of occupational inheritance. Where haulage was mechanised fewer boys were needed in the pits and in highly-mechanised districts such as the Lothians it became increasingly unusual for fathers to socialise their sons into the customs and practices of pit work.

Miners across the country had grievances over wage-levels, hours of work and safety standards between the wars but in Somerset the impact of the shortage of boys on the organisation of work was a major source of resentment. Managements' response was to introduce one-man places (making face workers' responsible for carting their coal) and to move breakers onto carting work, thus undermining their status and lowering their wages. Although mechanisation was widely preceived as a means of increasing the interest of the job and raising the miners' status the evidence from the Lothians suggests that it was not a positive incentive to recruitment in a coalfield where the mining tradition was comparatively weak and hostility to pit work relatively high. Increased dust and noise and the more impersonal relations of mechanised mining seems to have generated collective grievances

that outweighed any individual preferences for newer methods of work.

Throughout the inter-war period the mining population was increasingly integrated with the emergent mass society. Free time activities in the coalfields, for example, became less distinctive even though some traditional hobbies retained their popularity. Canary breeding and pigeon racing still went on but going to the cinema was the most popular recreation for Scottish miners and their wives by the 1940s and an interest in football tended to include national leagues, not merely local teams. The spread of public transport also opened up the world beyond the pit village, not only for recreational purposes but also by making it possible for miners and their sons to work in other jobs outside the coalfield. The insecurity and conditions of work in the pits often contrasted unfavourably with the opportunities provided by expanding light industries in areas, which encouraged some miners to migrate. Within some coalfields local job opportunities also increased, as they did in Somerset in the 1930s when Purnells' printing works expanded and a rising demand for road stone meant that more labour was needed in the Mendip quarries. War-time armament factories further increased occupational choice from the late 1930s.

Changes in occupational structure eroded the homogeneity of many mining settlements in the period. Houses built for miners by the coal companies were quite likely to be occupied by non-miners in Somerset by the 1940s although this was less likely in the Lothian communities of Newtongrange and Prestonpans. Similarly, union sponsorship became increasingly irrelevant in Somerset in the selection of Labour candidates for local elections. The SMA

was not a dominant force in the Frome Divisional Labour Party except for a brief period after the first World War and as time went by residual craft consciousness was eroded by growing class consciousness among political activists, and perhaps Labour supporters as well.

As Barry Supple has emphasised the public image of mining after 1913 was one of stagnation and decline, even though new coalfields were developed, technological improvements took place and there was no continuous or decisive fall in either living standards or profits⁽¹⁾. For miners and their families it seems that the image proved a more powerful influence on attitudes than the reality. Under the glare of publicity as the focus of official and unofficial concern over the inter-war problems of unemployment, poverty, housing and health standards, awareness grew in the mining population of its many disadvantages. Furthermore, miners and their families were in general quite convinced that they were regarded as socially inferior by the non-mining population. The question of status was a marked influence on attitudes in the mining communities towards pit work.

Nonetheless, there was evidently wide-spread goodwill among the general public towards mining and miners in the 1940s. Knowledge of the industry's problems and understanding of the miners' behaviour were not always as great as might have been expected (given the publicity of the 1940s and indeed, over much of the inter-war period) but sympathy and admiration were evident in the public response to official inquiries and Mass Observation

1. Supple, History of British Coal Industry, p.3.

surveys of opinion. Mining was still widely believed to be a job a man had to be 'born to'. General attitudes towards mining and miners remained ambivalent and subject to marked shifts in opinion in response to events within the industry, such as pit disasters or strike action.

Within the mining population there was less ambivalence. Results of the Social Survey inquiries suggested that a relatively small core of mining families retained a sense of pride in the skills of 'pit craft' and had some attachment to the industry. However, as the social and psychological isolation of the mining communities broke down over the inter-war period, circumstances within the industry and general socio-economic change combined to erode the tradition of occupational inheritance and to promote the growth of negative and hostile attitudes to mining as an occupation.

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